

# Lao PDR

## Gender, Poverty and the MDGs



ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK  
Mekong Department  
and Regional and Sustainable Development Department

# **LAO People's Democratic Republic**

## *Gender, Poverty and the Millennium Development Goals*

### **Country Gender Strategy**

**Mekong Department and  
Regional and Sustainable Development Department  
Asian Development Bank  
Manila, Philippines  
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This report is one of a series of country gender assessments and strategies prepared in conjunction with Asian Development Bank (ADB) country strategies and programs. The primary purpose of the series is to provide information on gender and development in ADB's developing member countries to assist ADB staff in country and strategy formulation and in project design and implementation. Preparation of this report was jointly undertaken by the Mekong Department (MKRD) and the Regional and Sustainable Development Department (RSDD) of ADB.

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The report updates information contained in an earlier publication, *Women in Development: Lao PDR*, ADB 1996.

It is hoped that the report will also be useful to government and nongovernment organizations and to individuals working in the field of gender and development.

## Abbreviations

ADB	—	Asian Development Bank
AFTA	—	ASEAN Free Trade Area
ASEAN	—	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AusAID	—	Australian Agency for International Development
CEDAW	—	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CPC	—	Committee for Planning and Cooperation
CRC	—	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSP	—	country strategy and program
DFID	—	United Kingdom Department for International Development
EU	—	European Union
GAD	—	gender and development
GMS	—	Greater Mekong Subregion
GRID	—	Gender Resource Information and Development Centre
GTZ	—	German Agency for Technical Cooperation
HIV/AIDS	—	human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
IFAD	—	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	—	International Labour Organization
IOM	—	International Organization for Migration
IUCN	—	International Union for Conservation of Nature
JFPR	—	Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction
JICA	—	Japan International Cooperation Agency
Lao PDR	—	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LECS 2	—	Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey 1997-98
LECS 3	—	Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey 2002-03
LNLS	—	Lao National Literacy Survey
LRM	—	Lao Resident Mission
LTP II	—	Second Land Titling Project
LWU	—	Lao Women's Union
MAF	—	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MCTPC	—	Ministry of Communication, Transport, Post and Construction
MDGs	—	Millennium Development Goals
MIH	—	Ministry of Industry and Handicrafts
MKRD	—	Mekong Department
MLSW	—	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
MOU	—	memorandum of understanding
NCAW	—	National Commission for the Advancement of Women
NCCA	—	National Committee for Control of AIDS
NGO	—	nongovernment organization

NGPES	—	National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy
NORAD	—	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NRDS	—	Northern Region Development Strategy
NSC	—	National Statistical Center
NTFP	—	non-timber forest product
PPA	—	participatory poverty assessment
PRC	—	People's Republic of China
RCSP	—	regional cooperation strategy and program
RETA	—	regional technical assistance
RRP	—	report and recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors
SEAHIV	—	South East Asia HIV and Development Project
SIDA	—	Swedish International Development Agency
SNV	—	Netherlands Development Organization
STD	—	sexually transmitted disease
SUNV	—	Partnership between SNV and United Nations Volunteers
UN	—	United Nations
UNAIDS	—	United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCTAD	—	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	—	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	—	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	—	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	—	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	—	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNIFEM	—	United Nations Development Fund for Women
WHO	—	World Health Organization
WSS	—	water supply and sanitation services
WTO	—	World Trade Organization

### **CURRENCY EQUIVALENTS**

(as of 1 December 2004)

Currency Unit	—	kip (KN)
KN	=	\$0.0000928
\$1.00	=	KN10,773

### **NOTE**

In this report, "\$" refers to US dollars.

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## **Executive Summary**

The Asian Development Bank's (ADB) country briefing paper on women in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), *Women in Development: Lao PDR* published in 1996, has been a valuable resource for ADB staff and for other development organizations and development specialists. In the intervening years, there have been a number of developments that affect women's and men's capabilities, opportunities, and agency. These include changes in Lao Government laws and policies, economic shocks such as the Asian financial crisis, rapid economic and social changes related to increasing trade and migration within the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), and renewed international commitments to poverty reduction and human development reflected in the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This paper updates the country briefing paper on women in light of these and other developments. The paper also provides an updated gender strategy and recommendations for ADB's future country strategy and program (CSP).

### **Recent Developments in Lao PDR**

Lao PDR, a small country in the heart of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), has a population of just over 5.5 million, including a diversity of ethnic groups, and is endowed with rich natural resources and biodiversity. However, the country also faces numerous challenges: a predominantly agrarian economy surrounded by rapidly industrializing neighbors; an increasingly young population with limited education and skills; mountainous and sparsely populated areas beyond the reach of basic services and infrastructure; mounting pressure on fragile forest and water resources; and limited national and local government capacity to raise revenues, to implement policies, and to enforce laws and regulations.

Since introducing the New Economic Mechanism in 1986, the Lao Government has been moving gradually from a centrally planned economy to a more market-based system. The opening of Lao PDR's economy has accelerated since the country joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1997. GMS initiatives, such as the development of transport corridors through the country, are further integrating Lao PDR in the regional economy.

The Lao economy grew steadily through the 1990s, with real GDP growth rates over 5% in every year but 1998 (when the economy felt the brunt of the Asian financial crisis). While steady economic growth substantially reduced the poverty rate in the capital Vientiane, it had much less impact on poverty in remote provinces, especially in the northern region. To make more effective progress in reducing poverty and implementing its Socio-Economic Development Plan, the Government recently prepared a National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES), which the Lao National Assembly endorsed in October 2003. The NGPES includes poverty-focused action plans for four key sectors—agriculture/forestry, education, health and transport—as well as several supporting sectors. The NGPES also identifies several inter-sectoral priorities, including gender equity and environmental conservation, and provides a gender strategy linked to each of the key NGPES sectors.

To achieve more balanced development among regions of the country, the Lao Government is also promoting regional development planning, beginning with the northern region. To this end, the Committee for Planning and Cooperation and several northern provinces recently developed a Northern Region Development Strategy (NRDS) with support from ADB. The NRDS builds on the priorities set out in the NGPES, and also includes a detailed gender strategy and a socio-cultural development strategy.

### **Gender Issues in Lao PDR**

Lao women play important roles in agriculture, small-scale businesses, manufacturing (especially the garment sector) and provision of basic services (especially education and health). Women in urban areas are also finding opportunities in information technology, tourism, and business services. Lao women are also primarily responsible for maintaining their families' food security and health. Their equal participation in economic, social, and political life is supported by the 1991 Constitution and various national laws and policies. Despite these national commitments, gender disparities persist in a number of areas. These gaps are especially pronounced in rural areas and among some ethnic groups.

Gender roles vary within rural communities of Lao PDR. These variations relate to age and ethnic identity, as well as to the location and livelihood activities of the community. Distinctions are often drawn between the status of women in "lowland" (usually ethnic Lao) communities and "upland" communities where most ethnic minority groups have traditionally lived. Ethnic minority women and girls are generally more disadvantaged because of their low literacy levels, limited access to health care and other basic services, long working hours, and limited roles in community decision making. However, marriage, residence, inheritance, and other practices can vary widely within ethnic groups. In addition, ethnic minority societies in Lao PDR are dynamic and constantly changing. Rapid social change is especially evident in upland villages that are relocating closer to roads and markets or that are being amalgamated with other villages including other ethnic groups. Traditional norms and practices are also changing as young people migrate to urban centers and to Thailand to work part of the year.

Certain gender biases cut across all ethnic groups, although women in some groups may be more seriously affected. For example, the gender division of labor in rural communities is often explained on the basis that men do the "heavy" work while women do the "light" work. However, many of women's traditional "light" tasks, such as weeding of upland rice fields, hand milling of rice, and gathering of fuel wood and water, are more tedious and time consuming than men's tasks. Women in all ethnic groups also have traditionally deferred to men in community decision making, in dealings with government officials, and in legal matters. This is particularly true in remote and ethnic minority communities where women have little direct contact with outsiders.

Despite progress in human development, gender gaps persist in a number of key education and health indicators. Women in Lao PDR have a far lower average literacy rate than men. For example, an ADB study in 2000 found a female literacy rate of 48% compared with a male literacy rate of 74%. This gap is much wider among some ethnic groups. Similar gaps are found in

enrollment and completion rates, and the gaps widen at higher levels of schooling. Several explanations have been offered for the low school attendance of poor girls in rural areas including their household responsibilities, the cost of clothing and school supplies, distance to the nearest school, language barriers for ethnic minority girls, and parents' skepticism about the quality and relevance of formal education for girls. However, a recent survey indicates that attitudes toward education are changing in some rural communities.

There has been improvement in a number of key health indicators, but Lao PDR still falls behind most other countries in the region. Maternal mortality declined from 750 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 530 in 2000, but this is still one of the highest rates in Asia. Infant and child mortality rates have also come down but are still high for the region. The higher mortality rates in rural areas can be linked to the greater distances to health centers and hospitals, the lower percentage of villages with medical practitioners, and the language barriers faced by ethnic minorities in seeking health services. The fertility rate declined from 5.6 in 1995 to 4.9 in 2000 with somewhat higher rates in rural areas and declining rates linked to years of education. Frequent pregnancies without adequate spacing place a serious strain on rural women's health. The persistently high fertility rate in rural areas also contributes to a high national dependency ratio (89 in 2000), and a persistently large percentage of the population under 15 years (about 44% in 2000). The reproductive health survey conducted in 2000 found that 32% of married couples were using family planning methods but that close to 40% of couples still needed family planning services with a higher percentage in rural areas. The survey also found that 24% of rural women had never heard of contraceptives, and 36% had never heard of HIV/AIDS.

More women than men are active in agriculture and fisheries, but women farmers have little direct access to agricultural extension services. Ethnic Lao women have traditional rights to inherit and own land, but women in some upland ethnic groups have traditionally accessed land mainly through their husbands or male relatives. Women are extremely active in handicraft production, food processing, small-scale trading, and services; studies have found that women own and operate most of the registered small businesses in the country. However, women entrepreneurs have limited access to market information, technical training, and financial services. As owners of micro and small businesses, they can also be hampered by complex business registration, licensing, and tax requirements. The latest national household survey confirms that Lao women and girls work on average more than one hour more per day than men and boys. The heavy workload on women and girls can impair their health and make it more difficult for girls to attend school.

Almost 23% of National Assembly members are women. This proportion compares favorably with the People's Republic of China and Viet Nam and surpasses many industrialized countries. Within the National Assembly, a women's caucus was formed in late 2002, and a gender mainstreaming strategy and action plan are being developed. However, Lao women are not well represented in other decision-making bodies and government offices. Retrenchments in the civil service beginning in the late 1980s resulted in disproportionate layoffs of women from government offices. They now represent a little over one third of government employees with very few women in senior government positions at national, provincial and district levels or in the judiciary. In 2000 women represented 1.2% of village chiefs and 1.6% of deputy village chiefs. The limited role of

women in village leadership and the limited number of ethnic minority women working as technical staff in provincial and district offices hamper the effectiveness of poverty reduction programs in rural areas and provide few role models for ethnic minority girls.

### **Gender-Related Trends**

Lao PDR is undergoing rapid change that will further intensify as road networks improve and inter-regional commerce expands. These changes are already having profound effects on economic activities and social norms, including gender norms. There is also growing awareness that Government policies and economic trends can have different effects on Lao women and men and among groups of women and men depending on their ethnicity, education and skill levels, location (urban or rural), and other factors.

The paper discusses the gender dimensions of national policies and trends related to *poverty reduction, human resource development, livelihoods and employment, infrastructure development, governance, and regional integration* (including increasing trade, tourism, and migration). Improved road networks, tourism development, and increasing migration also intensify social risks such as the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV/AIDS and human trafficking which are also discussed. For each of the trend areas, the paper identifies relevant national targets (including national MDG targets) and gender-sensitive approaches outlined in the gender strategies of the NGPES and NRDS.

### **Laws, Policies and Institutions Promoting Gender Equality**

Lao PDR is a party to several international treaties that promote gender equality, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Lao PDR also recently became a party to the Protocol to Prevent and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children and the Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air. Lao PDR has also taken steps to implement the plans of action from international conferences such as the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

Lao PDR has a sound legal framework to support gender equality and women's empowerment including equality provisions in the 1991 Constitution and in a number of national laws. New legislation entitled The Law on the Development and Protection of Women passed by the National Assembly in October 2004 also includes provisions on domestic violence and trafficking in women and children. However, there are gaps in the enforcement of certain laws (such as the 1994 Labour Law). In a number of areas, women do not enjoy the full benefit of equality under national laws because of the persistence of traditional practices (related to early marriage, social pressure against women seeking divorce, and inheritance practices of some ethnic groups that favor men, for example) and women's lack of awareness of their legal rights.

The Government recently established a National Commission for the Advancement of Women (NCAW). This high-level body is mandated to develop and coordinate implementation of

a national policy and action plan for women's advancement. The Lao Women's Union, one of four mass organizations authorized in the 1991 Constitution, continues to support Lao women's development as well as political mobilization through a network that extends to the village level. The Gender Resource Information and Development Project, a Lao Women's Union initiative, provides gender training, conducts gender-related research, and collects gender resources through centers in Vientiane and four other locations throughout the country. A large number of external agencies and international nongovernment organizations continue to support projects targeting women and girls and increasingly incorporate gender analysis and gender equality goals in their general development assistance programs. (See Annex.)

### ADB Gender Strategy for Lao PDR

It is appropriate to update ADB's gender strategy for Lao PDR to take account of the Government's forward-looking commitments to the MDGs, to poverty reduction, and to further economic liberalization and integration in the GMS and ASEAN. An updated gender strategy should also reflect the priorities in the NRDS, which ADB intends to support through its geographical focus on the northern region of Lao PDR, and in the new regional cooperation strategy and program for the GMS that will guide ADB's subregional activities.

Goal 3 of the MDGs—to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women—provides a relevant framework for ADB's gender-related work in Lao PDR. Although the target for this MDG focuses on eliminating gender disparities in education, the corresponding indicators are much broader.

<b>Indicator 9:</b>	Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary, and tertiary education
<b>Indicator 10:</b>	Ratio of literate women to men (15–24 years of age)
<b>Indicator 11:</b>	Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector
<b>Indicator 12:</b>	Proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament

ADB's new country gender strategy for Lao PDR is built on Goal 3 of the MDGs. Under this framework, ADB will promote:

- *equal capabilities* in women and men and girls and boys;
- *equal access to resources and opportunities*;
- *equality in decision making and rights*.

This gender strategy framework is consistent not only with the MDGs but also with the guarantees of equal treatment in the Lao Constitution and laws and with the gender strategies included in both the NGPES and the NRDS. It also can be linked to ADB's three core operational areas:

**Country Gender Strategy**

- equal capabilities
- equal access to resources and opportunities
- equality in decision making and rights

**ADB’s Core Operational Areas**

- inclusive social development
- pro-poor, sustainable, economic growth
- good governance

In operational terms, ADB will continue to promote *equal capabilities* through loans and grants for primary education, primary health care, water and sanitation, and other improvements in basic services. With an ongoing focus on the northern provinces, these investments should continue to address the particular circumstances of ethnic minority women and girls. Reproductive health services, family planning, and STD awareness should be prioritized and promoted through culturally appropriate means.

To promote *equal access to resources and opportunities*, ADB will continue to work with line agencies such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to expand livelihood opportunities for rural women as well as men in crop diversification, livestock raising, aquaculture, agroprocessing, and handicraft production. Women’s traditional land rights and access to community land must be protected. Projects promoting irrigation, other new technologies, and cash crops also need to be designed to ensure that women farmers benefit and that their subsistence activities are not undermined. In addition, ADB will support business reforms and financial services that benefit small businesses and traders, especially women. ADB can also promote sound labor practices in factories and larger enterprises through its work with industry and professional associations as well as with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.

ADB can support *equality in decision making and rights* on several levels. In specific loan projects, various strategies should be used to support women’s participation in decision-making bodies such as village committees and user groups. In ethnic minority communities, special confidence-building measures and woman-focused activities may be needed. Program and project loans should also support more gender and ethnic balance in the staffing of line ministries and local governments. ADB can support more gender-aware planning and programming through institutional support to specific line ministries or possibly to the new NCAW. There are also opportunities to promote gender-equitable reforms in areas such as land registration and titling, business regulation, and financial services; to support more effective enforcement of the Labour Law and industry codes of conduct on labor conditions; and to support law and policy reforms to address domestic violence and human trafficking.

Given ADB’s geographical focus on the northern provinces, it will also continue to be important to address the particular hardships and constraints of ethnic minority women. In light of the Government’s and ADB’s interest in promoting private sector development and regional trade, ADB’s country gender strategy should also ensure that the needs and interests of small business owners and traders, especially women, are addressed in trade and business reforms and private sector development projects. The increasing restlessness and mobility of Lao young people, including young women, also suggests a need for greater investment in skills and language training

and support for regional harmonization in skill certifications and labor standards. ADB's continuing support of large transport and hydropower projects also necessitates careful attention to the social risks associated with these projects.

The gender strategy recommends gender-inclusive approaches in each of the sectors that ADB supports including *human resource development, agriculture and natural resource management, private sector development, infrastructure development, governance, and regional cooperation*. Specific recommendations are also provided for the loans and technical assistance projects included in the proposed pipeline of ADB assistance. (See Table 7 at the end of Chapter VI.)

ADB is paying increasing attention to results including results-based approaches to country and regional programming. Therefore, it is appropriate to consider the gender-related results that ADB should seek to achieve through the new CSP for Lao PDR to be prepared in 2005. There are several relevant sources for targets and indicators of gender awareness, gender-inclusive processes, improvements in gender equity, and women's empowerment in Lao PDR. These include national targets related to the MDGs, the Government's commitments under CEDAW and other treaties, and components of the NGPES and NRDS gender strategies, many of which overlap. This gender strategy report refers to all of these sources. (For example, the NGPES gender strategy is summarized in Box 2 at the end of Chapter III.A. Each sector subheading of Chapter III also refers to the national MDG targets, parts of the NGPES and NRDS gender strategies, and international commitments that are relevant to the sector.) This report therefore can be a resource for developing gender-related results to include in the new Lao CSP as well as for preparing an overall gender strategy to include in the CSP.

The Asian Development Bank's (ADB) country briefing paper on women in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR)<sup>1</sup> published in 1996 has been a valuable resource for ADB staff and for other development organizations and development specialists. Many of its recommendations have been incorporated in loan projects and technical assistance supported by ADB. Its analysis of gender relations and women's status in Lao PDR and recommendations to ADB and other stakeholders are still timely and relevant. In the intervening years, there have been a number of developments that affect women's and men's capabilities, opportunities, and agency. These include changes in Lao Government laws and policies, economic shocks such as the Asian financial crisis, rapid economic and social changes related to increasing trade and migration within the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), and renewed international commitments to poverty reduction and human development reflected in the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This paper updates the country briefing paper on women in light of these and other developments. The paper also provides an updated gender strategy and recommendations for ADB's future country strategy and program (CSP).

Chapter II includes an overview of recent developments and gender issues in Lao PDR. Chapter III provides more detailed information on the gender dimensions of poverty, human development, livelihoods, environmental management, and governance in Lao PDR and gender-related trends in regional cooperation with other GMS countries. This thematic approach highlights links between Lao PDR's commitments to gender equality, its national targets to achieve the MDGs, and its National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES). The chapter draws on a number of sources, including the NGPES, the MDG Progress Report prepared jointly by the Government and the United Nations' (UN) Country Team in Lao PDR, the Northern Region Development Strategy supported by ADB, and the Gender Profile of the Lao PDR recently prepared by the Gender Resource Information and Development Centre (GRID). Chapter IV of the paper discusses recent developments in national laws, policies, and institutions that promote gender equality. Chapter V surveys current strategies and programs of donors and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) to support gender equality in Lao PDR. Finally, Chapter VI reviews the attention to gender issues in ADB's current portfolio of loans and technical assistance, and proposes an updated gender strategy and recommendations for ADB's future program of assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> ADB. 1996. *Women in Development: Lao PDR*. Manila.



### A. Recent Developments in Lao PDR

Lao PDR, a small country in the heart of the GMS, is classified as a “least-developed country” by the UN in terms of annual per capita income, human development, and economic vulnerability. However, the human development indicators for the country have been improving steadily, and Lao PDR was recently ranked a “medium human development country” by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).<sup>2</sup> Lao PDR’s rating has also improved in UNDP’s Gender-Related Development Index published in the same report.<sup>3</sup> (See Table 1.) The country has a population of just over 5.5 million, including a diversity of ethnic groups, and is endowed with rich natural resources and biodiversity. However, the country also faces numerous challenges: a predominantly agrarian economy surrounded by rapidly industrializing neighbors; an increasingly young population with limited education and skills; mountainous and sparsely populated areas beyond the reach of basic services and infrastructure; mounting pressure on fragile forest and water resources; and limited national and local government capacity to raise revenues, implement policies, and enforce laws and regulations.

**Table 1. Human Development Indicators for Lao PDR**

Indicator	1990	2000
Population	4.14 million	5.23 million
Population Growth (annual%)	2.1%	2.8%
Real GDP per capita	\$271 (1992)	\$317
Poverty (% population below national poverty line)	48%	39% (1997/98)
Poverty Gap Ratio	12%	10% (1997/98)
Net Primary Enrollment Ratio	58% (1991)	80%
Youth Literacy Rate (age 15-24)	70.1%	78.5%
Infant Mortality Rate (per 1,000 live births)	134	82
Under-5 Mortality (per 1,000 live births)	170	106.9
Maternal Mortality (per 100,000 live births)	750	530
Access to Safe Drinking Water (% population)	28%	58.1% (2002)

Sources: ADB Key Indicators of Developing Asian and Pacific Countries; Lao PDR National Human Development Report 2001; Lao PDR MDG Progress Report.

<sup>2</sup> UNDP. 2004. *Human Development Report 2004*. New York: Oxford University Press. However, Lao PDR has one of the lowest Human Development Index rankings in the Asia and Pacific region (a rating of 0.534 in 2004, and rank of 135 out of 177 countries). In the region, only Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Timor-Leste were ranked lower.

<sup>3</sup> In 2004, Lao PDR had a rating of 0.528 and ranked 107 out of 144 countries included in the Gender-Related Development Index, compared with a rating of 0.469 and a rank of 118 out of 143 countries in 2000. However, in the region, only Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan had lower ratings (Timor-Leste was not rated because of the unavailability of some data).

Since introducing its New Economic Mechanism in 1986, the Lao Government has been moving gradually from a centrally planned economy to a more market-based system. This economic transition has included the lifting of restrictions on private sector activity, the liberalization of prices and exchange rates, and expansion of trade with neighboring countries and overseas markets. The opening of Lao PDR's economy has accelerated since the country joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1997. GMS initiatives, such as the development of transport corridors through the country, are further integrating Lao PDR in the regional economy.

The Lao People's Revolutionary Party and the Lao Government have set ambitious targets for the social and economic development of the country. In 1996, the Sixth Party Congress set a long-term development goal to graduate from LDC status by 2020. In 2001, the Seventh Party Congress outlined a framework for reaching this goal, including strategies and targets to be achieved by 2010 and 2020 and the Five-Year Socio-Economic Development Plan (2001-2005). This development framework balances economic growth, sociocultural development, and environmental preservation. It also emphasizes balanced development among regions, urban and rural areas, and sectors; efficient use of both natural and human resources; and equitable income distribution. Under a prime minister's directive issued in 2000, the responsibility for carrying out the 5-year development plan is shared by the provinces (as "strategic units"), districts (as "planning units") and villages (as "basic implementing units").<sup>4</sup>

The Lao economy grew steadily through the 1990s, with real GDP growth rates over 5% in every year but 1998 (when the economy felt the brunt of the Asian financial crisis). However, inflation and devaluation of the Lao kip—especially during the Asian crisis—significantly eroded the value of civil servants' salaries. The percentage of public expenditures on social services also declined sharply following the Asian crisis. During the 1990s, the national poverty rate declined from 45% in 1992/93 to 39% in 1997/98. Preliminary results from the latest Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey (LECS 3) indicate that the poverty rate had declined further by 2002/03. However, the LECS 2 conducted in 1997/98 also showed wide variations in poverty rates among provinces and between rural and urban areas. While steady economic growth substantially reduced the poverty rate in the capital Vientiane, it had much less impact on poverty in remote provinces, especially in the northern region. A participatory poverty assessment (PPA) conducted in 2000 with support from ADB found that the majority of poor people surveyed were ethnic minority subsistence farmers practicing swidden cultivation. The PPA concluded that certain Government policies—especially relating to land-forest allocation—were actually contributing to rural poverty. Both the LECS 2 and the PPA also found strong correlations between poverty and limited access to basic services such as education, health care, clean water, and sanitation.

To make more effective progress in reducing poverty and implementing its Socio-Economic Development Plan, the Government recently prepared a National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES) that the Lao National Assembly endorsed in October 2003. The NGPES includes poverty-focused action plans for four key sectors—agriculture/forestry,

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<sup>4</sup> Lao PDR. 2000. "Instruction on the Establishment of Province as a Strategic Unit, District as a Planning Unit and Village as a Basic Implementing Unit." No. 01/PM (11 March 2000).

education, health, and transport—as well as several supporting sectors.<sup>5</sup> These action plans also incorporate targets to achieve the MDGs. Public investments under the NGPES will focus on the 47 poorest districts in the country. The NGPES also identifies several inter-sectoral priorities, including gender equity and environmental conservation, and provides a gender strategy linked to each of the key NGPES sectors. (The NGPES is discussed further in Chapter III.A.)

To achieve more balanced development among regions of the country, the Lao Government is also promoting regional development planning, beginning with the northern region. To this end, the Committee for Planning and Cooperation and eight northern provinces recently developed a Northern Region Development Strategy (NRDS) with support from ADB. The NRDS builds on the priorities set out in the NGPES and emphasizes human resource development, market-based approaches to economic development, and increased cooperation among provinces and with neighboring countries. The NRDS includes a detailed gender strategy and a sociocultural development strategy.

## **B. Gender Issues in Lao PDR**

Lao women play important roles in agriculture, small-scale businesses, manufacturing (especially the garment sector), and provision of basic services (especially education and health). Women in urban areas are also finding opportunities in information technology, tourism, and business services. Lao women are also primarily responsible for maintaining their families' food security and health. Their equal participation in economic, social, and political life is supported by the 1991 Constitution, various national laws and policies, and international treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). To promote gender equality, the Government recently established a National Commission for the Advancement of Women and has been improving the collection of statistics disaggregated by sex. Despite these national commitments, gender disparities persist in a number of areas. These gaps are especially pronounced in rural areas and among some ethnic groups.

Gender roles vary within rural communities of Lao PDR. These variations relate to age and ethnic identity as well as to the location and livelihood activities of the community. Distinctions are often drawn between the status of women in “lowland” (usually ethnic Lao) communities and “upland” communities where most ethnic minority groups have traditionally lived. (See Box 1.) Both the country briefing paper on women and the PPA found that ethnic minority women are the most disadvantaged in Lao society. Even within the dominant Lao ethnic group, a recent Gender Resource Information and Development Centre (GRID) survey found a number of differences in gender norms between urban and rural households.<sup>6</sup> The PPA also documented variations in the division of labor and decision making among ethnic groups in rural areas. Some general patterns could be traced to the ethnicity of the survey villages, but the PPA also found that gender roles were heavily influenced by the livelihood activities in the villages. Women's labor inputs were

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<sup>5</sup> These supporting sectors include energy and rural electrification, agroforestry, tourism, mining, construction, industrial and small/medium enterprise development, and trade.

<sup>6</sup> LWU/GRID. 2000. *Marriage and Family in the Lao PDR*. Vientiane.

found to be highest in poor villages practicing upland rice cultivation in contrast to more prosperous lowland villages where paddy rice was cultivated.

### **Box 1: Gender and Ethnicity in Lao People's Democratic Republic**

In Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), 47 official ethnic groups are recognized, although some have identified as many 230 distinct groups on the basis of language and other differences. The Lao Front for National Construction has proposed a new classification system based on four ethnolinguistic family groups (Lao-Tai, Mon-Khmer, Hmong-Mien and Chine-Tibet). However, official documents continue to refer to three popular categories that correspond loosely to ethnic groups' traditional habitats and agricultural practices: Lao Lum (lowland Lao); Lao Theung (midland Lao); and Lao Sung (highland Lao). In this paper, "ethnic Lao" refers to the Lao ethnic group within the Lao-Thai ethnolinguistic family that traditionally inhabited the Mekong river basin and cultivated paddy rice. According to the 1995 population census, the Lao ethnic group represents 52.5% of the population. Although a majority of the national population, ethnic Lao are outnumbered by other ethnic groups in several provinces, particularly in the northern region.

The relatively higher status of women in ethnic Lao communities is often attributed to their traditional matrilineal residence and bilateral kinship and inheritance patterns. In contrast, ethnic minority groups such as the Hmong traditionally have followed patrilineal residence and patrilineal kinship and inheritance patterns. Because ethnic Lao married couples traditionally lived close to the wife's parents, women could more easily maintain close ties with other family members and could rely on them for resources and other support. Women were also more likely to inherit paddy land, and youngest daughters who remained at home to take care of their aging parents often inherited the family home as well. In contrast, Hmong couples typically lived close to the husband's family which made it more difficult for women to draw support from their families after marriage. Hmong women were also unlikely to inherit or acquire land and other substantial assets that typically passed to their brothers. Other ethnic minority groups such as the Khmou have followed more mixed residence, kinship, and inheritance practices. In all cases, however, there is considerable variation in gender-related norms and practices within ethnic groups. These norms and practices are also undergoing rapid change in response to economic liberalization, relocation of villages, migration to urban centers, and other trends.

Gender relations within ethnic groups in Lao PDR have been examined in various microstudies and social assessments supported by development agencies and NGOs, usually related to specific rural development projects. Some of these studies and assessments are included in the references to this paper. Particular attention has been paid to traditional practices related to land ownership and inheritance in light of the 1998 Land Law and Government programs to allocate, register, and title land (see Chapters III.C.1 and IV.B). A pilot survey on the situation of Lao women conducted in 1998 by the Gender Resource Information and Development Centre and the National Statistical Center also considered ethnicity issues, although the survey samples from non-Lao ethnic groups were considered too small to be statistically significant. The participatory poverty assessment conducted in 2000 reported findings from discussions in poor ethnic minority villages on the gender division of labor, on household decision making, and on other issues. More recently, the World Bank commissioned a pilot study on gender and ethnicity, and ADB is undertaking a study on gender inequalities in access to natural resources in selected ethnic minority communities.

*Sources:* Chamberlain, James. 2002. *Assessment of Economic Potentials and Comparative Advantages of the Ethnic Minority Groups of Lao PDR*. Vientiane: ADB. 1996. *Women in Development: Lao PDR*. Manila.  
 LWU/GRID 2000; Ireson-Doolittle, Carol and Geraldine Moreno-Black. 2003. *The Lao: Gender, Power and Livelihood*. Boulder, Colorado; ADB. 2001. *Participatory Poverty Assessment: Lao PDR (PPA)*. Manila.  
 SODECO. 2000. *Exploratory Study of Gender Dimensions of Poverty Eradication among Ethnic Groups in Lao PDR*.

Gender and ethnicity issues have become increasingly important as the Government expands the reach of basic services to remote areas and as government policies on land allocation and titling, shifting cultivation, and opium production increasingly affect the livelihoods and practices of ethnic minority groups. ADB's country briefing paper on Lao women and the PPA both noted the scarcity of ethnographic research on ethnic groups in Lao PDR and the need for more systematic study of gender relations within these groups. This is an important but challenging project. Marriage, residence, inheritance, and other practices can vary widely within ethnic groups. In addition, ethnic minority societies in Lao PDR are dynamic and constantly changing. Rapid social change is especially evident in upland villages that are relocating closer to roads and markets or that are being amalgamated with other villages including other ethnic groups. A recent study of relocated ethnic minority villages in Luang Namtha and Sekong found numerous changes in cultural patterns, including the adoption of lowland-style housing, dress, marriage practices, and technologies. However, the gender division of labor in resettled households remains essentially unchanged, with women and girls continuing to carry out most of the household work in addition to livelihood activities.<sup>7</sup> Traditional norms and practices are also changing as young people migrate to urban centers and to Thailand to work part of the year.

Certain gender biases cut across all ethnic groups, although women in some groups may be more seriously affected. For example, the gender division of labor in rural communities is often explained on the basis that men do the "heavy" work while women do the "light" work. However, many of women's traditional "light" tasks, such as weeding of upland rice fields, hand milling of rice, and gathering of fuel wood and water, are more tedious and time consuming than men's tasks. There is also an assumption that men are more mechanically inclined. Therefore, when agricultural processes are mechanized—for example, through the introduction of power tillers or modern irrigation systems—men tend to assume control of the new technology, although women often contribute the cash needed to buy and maintain the equipment. Women in all ethnic groups also have traditionally deferred to men in community decision making, in dealings with government officials, and in legal matters. This is particularly true in remote and ethnic minority communities where women have little direct contact with outsiders. This gender norm has broad implications for women's participation in governance at all levels, their control of land and small business assets, and their legal awareness and empowerment.

Despite progress in human development, gender gaps persist in a number of key education and health indicators. Women in Lao PDR have a far lower average literacy rate than men. For example, an ADB study in 2000 found a female literacy rate of 48% compared with a male literacy rate of 74%. This gap is much wider among some ethnic groups. For example, the female literacy rate among Khmou is 23% compared with 61% for men. The female rate among Hmong is 8% compared with 46% for men.<sup>8</sup> Similar gaps are found in enrollment and completion rates, and the

<sup>7</sup> Alton, Charles and Houmphanh Rattanavong. 2004. *Service Delivery and Resettlement: Options for Development Planning* (UNDP/ECHO livelihoods study). Vientiane.

<sup>8</sup> ADB. 2000. *Lao PDR Country Report: Health and Education Needs of Ethnic Minorities in the Greater Mekong Subregion*. Research Triangle Park, North Carolina: Research Triangle Institute. The Lao National Literacy Survey 2001 found much lower tested literacy rates for women and men (45%

gaps widen at higher levels of schooling. Several explanations have been offered for the low school attendance of poor girls in rural areas, including their household responsibilities, the cost of clothing and school supplies, distance to the nearest school, language barriers for ethnic minority girls, and parents' skepticism about the quality and relevance of formal education for girls. However, a recent survey indicates that attitudes toward education are changing in some rural communities.

There has been improvement in a number of key health indicators, but Lao PDR still falls behind most other countries in the region. Maternal mortality declined from 750 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 530 in 2000, but this is still one of the highest rates in Asia. Infant and child mortality rates have also come down but are still high for the region. The higher mortality rates in rural areas can be linked to the greater distances to health centers and hospitals, the lower percentage of villages with medical practitioners, and the language barriers faced by ethnic minorities in seeking health services. The fertility rate has declined from 5.6 in 1995 to 4.9 in 2000 with somewhat higher rates in rural areas and declining rates linked to years of education. Frequent pregnancies without adequate spacing place a serious strain on rural women's health. The persistently high fertility rate in rural areas also contributes to a high national dependency ratio (89 in 2000) and to a persistently large percentage of the population under 15 years (about 44% in 2000).<sup>9</sup> The reproductive health survey conducted in 2000 found that 32% of married couples were using family planning methods but that close to 40% of couples still needed family planning services, with a higher percentage in rural areas. The survey also found that 24% of rural women had never heard of contraceptives, and 36% had never heard of HIV/AIDS.

More women than men are active in agriculture and fisheries, but women farmers have little direct access to agricultural extension services. Ethnic Lao women have traditional rights to inherit and own land, but women in some upland ethnic groups have traditionally accessed land mainly through their husbands or male relatives. Women are extremely active in handicraft production, food processing, small-scale trading, and services; studies have found that women own and operate most of the registered small businesses in the country. However, women entrepreneurs have limited access to market information, technical training, and financial services. As owners of micro and small businesses, they can also be hampered by complex business registration, licensing, and tax requirements. The LECS 3 recently confirmed that Lao women and girls work on average more than one hour more per day than men and boys.<sup>10</sup> The heavy workload on women and girls can impair their health and make it more difficult for girls to attend school.

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compared with 60%). Lao PDR and UN Country Team. 2004. *Millennium Development Goals Progress Report: Lao PDR* (MDG Progress Report). Vientiane.

<sup>9</sup> National Statistical Center (NSC). 2001. *Report of the Lao Reproductive Health Survey 2000*. Vientiane.

<sup>10</sup> NSC. 2004. *The Households of Lao PDR: Social and Economic Indicators – Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey 2002-03* (LECS 3). Vientiane. The time-use data included in the survey cover adults and children 10 years and older. Women/girls were found to work an average of 7 hours a day, compared with 5.8 hours for men/boys.

Almost 23% of National Assembly members are women. This proportion compares favorably with the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Viet Nam, and surpasses many industrialized countries. Within the National Assembly, a women's caucus was formed in late 2002, and a gender mainstreaming strategy and action plan are being developed.<sup>11</sup> However, Lao women are not well represented in other decision-making bodies and government offices. Retrenchments in the civil service beginning in the late 1980s resulted in disproportionate layoffs of women from government offices. They now represent a little over one third of government employees with very few women in senior government positions at national, provincial and district levels.<sup>12</sup> In 2000 women represented 1.2% of village chiefs and 1.6% of deputy village chiefs.<sup>13</sup> The limited role of women in village leadership and the limited number of ethnic minority women working as technical staff in provincial and district offices hamper the effectiveness of poverty reduction programs in rural areas and provide few role models for ethnic minority girls.

Lao PDR is undergoing rapid change that will further intensify as road networks improve and as inter-regional commerce expands. These changes are already having profound effects on economic activities and social practices. These effects are most visible in urban areas, where women as well as men have increasing opportunities for advanced education and technical training, wage employment, adequate health care, and financial and social independence. This is in stark contrast to the situation of rural women, especially ethnic minority women in remote areas, who have limited education and are burdened by overwork, frequent pregnancies, and poor health. Social change is also evident in the attitudes and behavior of young people, especially those who are migrating to urban centers and to Thailand for work and adventure.

There is growing awareness that Government policies and economic trends can have different effects on Lao women and men and among groups of women and men depending on their ethnicity, education and skill levels, location (urban or rural), and other factors. These policies and trends include (i) land allocation and titling processes; (ii) the commercialization of agriculture; (iii) extension of road networks; (iv) development of manufacturing, tourism, and other services; and (v) increasing mobility (including movements of young people to urban areas and to neighboring countries for work and the influx of construction workers, traders, and transport operators from neighboring countries). Increasing tourism and migration also intensify social risks such as the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV/AIDS,<sup>14</sup> and human trafficking. These trends and risks are discussed further in Chapter III.

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<sup>11</sup> MDG Progress Report, op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> UNDP. 2001. *National Human Development Report Lao PDR 2001: Advancing Rural Development* (National HDR 2001). Vientiane; LWU/ GRID 2002 Calendar. Vientiane.

<sup>13</sup> National HDR 2001, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> Human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.

**A. Gender and Poverty****1. Poverty in Lao PDR**

In recent years, the Government of Lao PDR has focused increasingly on the problem of poverty, especially in rural areas where about 80% of the population lives. The concept of poverty as understood in the international development community does not translate easily into Lao or the languages of other ethnic groups in the country.<sup>15</sup> However, a Prime Ministerial Instruction issued in 2001 provides the official definition of poverty in Lao PDR:

Poverty is the lack of ability to fulfill basic needs, such as: not having enough food (less than 2,100 calories per day/capita), lack of adequate clothing, not having permanent housing, not capable of meeting expenses for health care, not capable of meeting educational expenses for one's self and other family members, and lack of access to transport routes.<sup>16</sup>

The Prime Ministerial Instruction also includes poverty indicators at the household, village, and district levels. For example, a household is considered poor if it has income equivalent to less than Kip 85,000 per person per month (at 2001 prices). A village is considered poor based on the percentage of poor households and access to schools, health facilities, safe water supply, and roads or trails. However, since poverty is not measured at the individual level, these official indicators do not permit disaggregation of poverty data on the basis of gender.

**2. National Trends and Targets on Poverty and Hunger**

The Government intends to use the official poverty definition and indicators to measure progress toward Target 1 under the first MDG—to halve the proportion of people living in poverty by 2015. There are two corresponding national targets: (i) to reduce the proportion of people living below the national poverty line to 24%, and (ii) to reduce the poverty gap ratio to 6%.<sup>17</sup> (See Table 2.) This is achievable based on the trend in poverty reduction during the 1990s. Based on LECS 1 and LECS 2, the proportion of people living below the poverty line fell from 45% in 1992/93 to

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<sup>15</sup> For example, the participatory poverty assessment notes that in the Lao language, “poor” refers to the condition of suffering that arises from the human condition; in the Khmou language, the term means “unfortunate” and is associated mainly with fate. These local meanings contrast sharply with the economic and other physical conditions associated with the word “poor” in English.

<sup>16</sup> Lao PDR. 2001. Instructions on the Development of Poverty Eradication Programs. No. 010/PM, 25 June 2001. Vientiane. (As translated into English in the NGPES, p. 20.) The calorie requirement was subsequently reduced to 1,923 calories per day.

<sup>17</sup> The poverty gap ratio measures the average depth of poverty in the population (with depth of poverty being calculated as the distance below the poverty line as a proportion of that line).



39% in 1997/98.<sup>18</sup> During the same period, the poverty gap ratio also dropped from 12% to 10%. Preliminary results from the LECS 3 indicate a further drop in poverty in 2002/2003.

Despite progress in reducing the incidence and depth of poverty, there is considerable variation in poverty levels between urban and rural areas and among provinces. For example, the 1997/1998 poverty rate was lowest in the Vientiane capital (12%) and Xayabury province (21%) and highest in the northern provinces of Houaphanh (75%), Oudomxay (73%) and Phongsaly (64%). There were similar variations in the poverty gap ratio.<sup>19</sup> In 1997/98, both the poverty rate and poverty gap ratio in the northern region were higher than in the central or southern regions. Moreover, the rate of poverty reduction was lower in the north than in the other regions.

**Table 2: Millennium Development Goal 1 and National Targets on Poverty and Hunger**

<b>MDG 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger</b>			
<b>Target 1: Halve between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of people living in poverty</b>			
<b>Indicators:</b>	<b>Lao PDR Baseline</b>	<b>Recent Status</b>	<b>2015 Target</b>
1a: Proportion of people below poverty line	48% (1990)	39% (1997/1998)	24%
2: Poverty gap ratio	12% (1990)	10% (1997/1998)	6%
<b>Target 2: Halve between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of people who suffer from hunger</b>			
4: Prevalence of underweight children under 5 years	40% (1990)	40% (2000)	20%
5: Proportion of population below minimum level of dietary consumption	31% (1990)	29% (1998)	16%

Source: Lao PDR MDG Progress Report

Lao PDR has made less progress in combating hunger, as reflected in recent trend data on underweight children and minimum dietary intake. (See Table 2.) The proportion of underweight children under five years—40%—is virtually unchanged since 1990. (The MDG Progress Report notes that the actual figure may be higher, since nutrition surveys often undersample in remote rural areas.) The proportion of the population consuming less than the minimum dietary level has dropped only slightly since 1990. Based on these trends, Lao PDR will not meet its national targets on hunger reduction by 2015.

<sup>18</sup> The poverty rate based on LECS data is the percentage of the population whose consumption of food and non-food essentials is below the national poverty line. For 1997/1998, for example, the overall poverty line was Kip 15,218 per person per month.

<sup>19</sup> The 1997/1998 poverty gap ratio was lowest in the Vientiane capital (3%) and Xayabury (3%), and highest in Oudomxay (25%), Houaphanh (23%), Xaysomboun Special Region (20%) and Phongsaly (17%). Between 1992/93 and 1997-1998, the poverty gap ratio declined by 19% in the Vientiane capital, but actually increased by 19% in Oudomxay. Kakwani, Nanak et al. 2002 (revised). *Poverty in Lao PDR During the 1990s*.

The MDG Progress Report notes that the traditional Lao diet is generally inadequate in both quantity and quality. Although it is assumed that people in rural areas are more prone to hunger and malnutrition, this does not take into account the variety of alternative food sources in forest areas that poor rural households rely on to compensate for rice deficits. However, the nutrient content of these forest foods is just beginning to be analyzed. There is general agreement that the traditional weaning practices of most ethnic groups contribute to the malnutrition of young children. Some traditional food taboos for pregnant and postpartum women also can deprive women and infants of important nutrients. In addition, the 2000 national health survey found that girls are more likely to suffer deficiencies of Vitamin A and iodine and that women are more likely to suffer iron deficiencies.<sup>20</sup>

### **3. National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES)**

The NGPES is the Government's blueprint for meeting MDG 1 and its own national targets for poverty reduction. Based on the official definition of poverty that emphasizes food security and access to basic services, the NGPES includes action plans for the four key sectors in which poverty reduction will be emphasized: agriculture, education, health, and road transport. Several supporting sectors are also mentioned including rural electrification, tourism, industrial development (especially small and medium-sized enterprises), and trade. Based on the official indicators of district-level poverty, the NGPES identifies the poorest 42 districts in the country that will be the main targets for priority investments and an additional 25 poor districts that will also receive attention. The NGPES also emphasizes cross-sectoral priorities including gender equality, population policy, and environmental conservation. As discussed further below, the NGPES includes a gender strategy to promote gender equality across the key sectors for poverty reduction.

### **4. Gender Dimensions of Poverty in Lao PDR**

Quantitative measures of poverty in Lao PDR such as the official measures of household and district-level poverty do not provide insight on the gender dimensions of poverty because they do not indicate the allocation of income, resources, and consumption within households. However, the LECS 3 includes more information on individual household members which should permit more gender disaggregation and gender analysis of the survey data than in previous household surveys. Recent qualitative poverty studies such as the PPA and a pilot study of human security have already provided valuable information on the different vulnerabilities and on coping mechanisms of poor women and men. These findings are reflected in the NGPES and are the basis for the NGPES gender strategy (discussed further below). Gender issues are also being considered in the system for participatory monitoring of poverty reduction programs that is being developed with support from ADB.

The PPA conducted in 2000 found that women in poor rural villages are active in a variety of economic and household activities including agricultural production and processing; raising small livestock; collection of water, fuel wood, and non-timber forest products; food preparation;

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Health, National Institute of Public Health, State Planning Committee and NSC. 2001. *Health Status of the People in Lao PDR*. Vientiane.

childcare; and various types of handicraft production. The PPA found that poor women generally work much longer hours than men. Poor women also have much lower literacy rates than the men of their villages. In the ethnic minority villages surveyed, many women do not speak Lao. This seriously limits their ability to engage with health care workers, extension workers, traders, and others outside their villages. The PPA also found extremely high maternal and infant mortality rates in the surveyed villages even by national standards—averaging about one mother and one child in each village in the previous year. In most of the villages, men are the primary decision makers, although women have some influence in the family and community.

Most of the poor surveyed in the PPA are from ethnic minority groups that have traditionally cultivated upland rice (as opposed to paddy rice). Their main indicators of poverty are rice insufficiency and loss of livestock. The PPA found that poor villages have an average rice sufficiency of 7 months, and that villages in the Mon-Khmer ethnolinguistic family (such as the Khmou) have the greatest rice deficits. Poor villagers frequently attributed their rice deficit problems to the shortening of fallow cycles under the Government's land-forest allocation program which has resulted in lower rice yields. This substantially increases the work burden on poor rural women. The shorter fallow cycle means that more time needs to be spent clearing fallows of weeds which is usually done by women. Yet the soil depletion caused by the shorter rotation period also reduces rice yields. To make up for the rice deficit, poor women spend additional time gathering other food sources in forest areas. Increasingly, however, these alternative food sources are becoming depleted. Poor villagers also complained about frequent epidemics affecting their small livestock. Since women typically raise pigs, chickens, and other small livestock, these epidemics devastate women's livelihood activities.<sup>21</sup>

In conjunction with the PPA, the Lao Women's Union (LWU) and the State Planning Committee (now the Committee for Planning and Cooperation [CPC]) organized a workshop on gender and poverty with support from ADB.<sup>22</sup> The workshop included representatives from district and provincial levels. Several recommendations emerged from the workshop, including: (i) reduction of women's heavy workloads through appropriate technologies and improved access to clean water, (ii) improvement of women's and girls' education levels, (iii) improvement of maternal and child health (including family planning), (iv) more income-generating opportunities for women through skills training and microfinance, and (v) more budget resources for programs to address women's needs.

A recent study of human security in three provinces also found that women and men have different perceptions of vulnerability and different strategies for coping with economic, environmental, social, and cultural threats. For example, the study found that women have a keener perception of threats and are more concerned with rice shortages, water shortages and water quality, poor health, and low education and skills. Women were also found to use a wider range of positive strategies to cope with economic and other hardships including reducing expenses, raising

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<sup>21</sup> Alton and Rattanaovong, op. cit. Similar conditions were found in a recent study of Akha and Katu ethnic minority villages in Luang Namtha and Sekong.

<sup>22</sup> The workshop was supported by ADB regional technical assistance in 1999.

livestock, gardening, handicraft production, trading, and working with neighbors on joint activities.<sup>23</sup>

## 5. NGPES Gender Strategy

The NGPES addresses these gender-specific concerns through a broad gender strategy that recognizes poor women's important roles in agriculture and other sectors and their primary role in maintaining their families' food security and health. The gender strategy also reflects the findings that poor rural women are overworked and burdened by low literacy levels and poor health, yet they still manage to cope pragmatically with food shortages and other hardships. Therefore, the strategy recognizes that, "...[t]he Government...will not be able to realize the goals of reducing poverty and improving national education, health and population indicators without the active participation of all women, particularly poor and ethnic minority women." The strategy identifies concrete steps to be taken in the four key NGPES sectors and also supports gender mainstreaming in supporting sectors such as handicraft production, tourism, and trade and in governance at all levels. Highlights of the gender strategy are summarized in Box 2.<sup>24</sup>

## 6. International Commitments on Gender and Rural Poverty

The NGPES gender strategy also furthers the Government's international commitments to address the gender dimensions of poverty, especially in rural areas of Lao PDR. For example, Article 14 of CEDAW, which Lao PDR ratified in 1981, requires state parties to, "...take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy." More specifically, Article 14 requires state parties to ensure that rural women can participate in community activities and development planning; have access to adequate health care facilities (including family planning); benefit directly from social security programs; benefit from training and education programs (including extension services); have access to agricultural credit, marketing and appropriate technology; benefit from equal treatment in land reform and resettlement schemes; and enjoy adequate living conditions (including housing, water supply and sanitation, electricity, transport, and communications).

Women and poverty is also one of the twelve areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action that Lao PDR and other countries endorsed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. Actions that governments committed to take include (i) collecting data on poverty disaggregated by gender; (ii) developing statistics to recognize the full extent of women's work and their contributions to the national economy; (iii) analyzing the impact of policies and programs on poverty and inequality, especially in relation to women; (iv) enhancing women's access to agricultural inputs and services, housing and land; (v) allocating public expenditures to address

<sup>23</sup> Committee for Planning and Cooperation (CPC) and United Nations Centre for Regional Development. 2002. *A Study on Integrating Human Security Concerns in Local Development in Three Provinces of the Lao PDR*. Vientiane. (This study is cited extensively in the NGPES.)

<sup>24</sup> Lao PDR. 2003. *National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy* (NGPES). Vientiane. Chapter 6.1 (gender strategy) and Annex 3.5 (gender strategy matrix).

basic social, education, and health needs of poor women; (vi) providing adequate safety nets (including community-based support systems); (vii) developing and implementing anti-poverty programs to improve poor women’s access to food; and (viii) addressing the needs of indigenous women and migrant women.

**Box 2: National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy: Gender Strategy**

The strategy calls for several actions to be taken in the four main NGPES sectors and in governance including:

*Agriculture*

- Gender analysis and needs assessments in preparation of projects;
- Women’s participation in farmer groups and extension/training;
- Use of indicators disaggregated by sex;
- Increased representation of women in provincial and district offices including extension workers;
- Woman farmers as gender focal points in villages to improve agricultural practices;
- Vaccination of small livestock;
- Attention to women’s traditional land rights in land allocation, land titling, and resolution of land disputes;
- Assistance to women in accessing rural savings and credit schemes.

*Education*

- Increase in number of ethnic minority teachers;
- Improved relevance of primary school materials;
- Incentives for girls to attend school;
- Support to provinces and districts to develop locally appropriate materials to supplement the core curriculum;
- School schedules to accommodate students’ home responsibilities;
- “Bridge” courses to prepare students for vocational and technical schools;
- Literacy/numeracy training included in extension and small business support programs.

*Health*

- Training and promotion of more ethnic minority staff and health care providers especially at provincial and district levels;
- Gender focal points in provincial and district primary health committees;
- Increased participation of women in village health committees;
- Gender and ethnic balance in in-service and specialized training;
- Incentives for health care workers in remote areas;
- Men and youth targeted for health care messages on birth spacing and prevention of STDs;
- Expanded reproductive health services for ethnic minority women.

*Transport*

- Consultations with local communities, including women, on design of roads and transport facilities;
- Gender analysis included in impact assessments for new transport and infrastructure projects;
- Community development projects to ensure local benefits from road and other infrastructure projects;
- Monitoring of project impacts disaggregated by sex;
- Health awareness campaigns in construction camps, along road corridors, and at transit stops;
- Women’s participation in community road maintenance funds.

*Governance*

- Increased percentage of women in government positions at national, provincial, and district levels;
- Encouragement to village leaders and committees to include more women in local decision making;
- Awareness-raising on legal rights and remedies (e.g., relating to land, employment, and personal security) among women, especially rural and ethnic minority women.

## **B. Gender and Human Resource Development**

Lao PDR recognizes the importance of developing its human resources. However, much more remains to be done, especially to narrow gender gaps and to address the needs of poor communities in remote areas. Both the Five-Year Socio-Economic Development Plan (2001-2005) and the NGPES therefore include ambitious targets for improving basic services such as education, health, and water supply and sanitation. The NGPES also represents the Government's framework for making progress toward the MDGs. The NGPES prioritizes the needs of the poorest districts many of which are in remote areas populated by ethnic minorities. The NGPES also emphasizes the importance of narrowing gender gaps in education and health, and its gender strategy includes specific measures to narrow these gaps.

### **1. Education**

#### **a. National Trends and Targets on Education**

Lao PDR has made progress in education especially at the primary level. Over the past 10 years, net enrollment in primary school increased from 58% to over 80%, and completion rates through grade 5 increased from 48% to about 60%. During the same period, the gender gap in primary school enrollment also narrowed with the ratio of girls to boys enrolled in primary school rising from 77% to over 83%. (See Table 3.) However, these national rates mask significant gaps between urban and rural areas and among provinces. For example, the MDG Progress Report notes that net enrollment rates are over 95% in both the capital Vientiane and in Vientiane Province but are less than 60% in the remote, predominantly rural provinces of Attapeu and Phongsaly. The NGPES points out that gender gaps in enrollment are still significant in some areas, especially in the northern provinces.

Adult literacy rates also vary significantly based on gender and ethnicity and between urban and rural areas and among provinces. The LECS 2 found adult literacy to be 88% in urban areas compared with 65% in rural areas. Literacy rates also ranged from 90% in the capital Vientiane to 35% in Luang Namtha.<sup>25</sup> An ADB study in 2000 found that only 48% of women were literate compared with 74% of men, with much wider gaps among some ethnic groups.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the Lao National Literacy Survey 2001 (LNLS) indicates that many reported literacy rates may be substantially overstated. The LNLS found that only 51% of adults (ages 15–24) tested at a basic literacy level and that only 45% of women tested at a basic literacy level compared with

<sup>25</sup> The LECS 3 recently updated these figures for 2002/03. The survey estimated that 79% of men and 57% of women can read and write without difficulty. If those who can read and write with some difficulty are added, the literacy rates rise to 85% of men and 64% of women (or 74% of the population as a whole). By this measure, literacy rates are substantially higher in urban areas (95% of men and 85% of women), and are lowest in rural areas without road access (69% of men and 39% of women).

<sup>26</sup> The female literacy rate among Khmou was found to be 23% compared with 61% for men. Among Hmong, the female rate was 8% compared with 46% for men. The lowest literacy rates were found among Akha and Lahu with male literacy below 10% and female literacy below 1%.

60% of men. These results reinforce concerns about the quality of basic education in Lao PDR. The large gender gap in tested literacy reflects the limited access that rural and ethnic minority women have had to basic education. It also reflects the problem of “reverse literacy” common to many ethnic minority women who have few opportunities to use the Lao language as adults.<sup>27</sup>

**Table 3: Millennium Development Goals and National Targets on Education**

<b>MDG 2:</b> Achieve Universal Primary Education			
<b>Target 3:</b> Ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a fully course of primary schooling			
<b>Indicators:</b>	<b>Lao PDR Baseline</b>	<b>Recent Status</b>	<b>2015 Target</b>
6: Net enrollment in primary school	58% (1991)	83% (2002)	98%
7: Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5	48% (1991)	62% (2001)	95%
8: Literacy rate in age group 15-24 years	79% (2001)	79% (2001)	99%
<b>MDG 3:</b> Promote gender equality and empowerment of women			
<b>Target 4:</b> Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2015			
<b>Indicators:</b>	<b>Lao PDR Baseline</b>	<b>Recent Status</b>	<b>2015 Target</b>
9: Ratio of girls to boys in primary (P), secondary (LS and US) and tertiary (T) education (number of girls per 100 boys enrolled)	(1991) P: 77% LS: 66% US: 56% T: 49%	(2002) P: 84% LS: 74% US: 68% T: 58%	100%
10: Ratio of literate women to men, age 15-24 years	81% (1995)	90% (2001)	100%

Source: Lao PDR MDG Progress Report

The Government has set a number of ambitious targets to improve primary school enrollment and completion, to increase adult literacy, and to narrow gender gaps in school enrollment and literacy. (See Table 3.) However, the MDG Progress Report notes that year-to-year improvements in these areas have been very uneven. Therefore it appears unlikely that the national targets will be met by 2015. These targets will be especially difficult to meet in rural areas, particularly in the northern provinces where school attendance rates are low and dropout and repetition rates are high even by national standards.

#### **b. Gender Issues in Education**

The PPA and other studies have identified several reasons for the low school attendance of poor girls from rural areas, especially in higher grades. These include:

<sup>27</sup> The phenomenon of “reverse literacy” or “backsliding” among ethnic minority women was highlighted in ADB’s country briefing paper on Lao women.

- girls' household responsibilities, including care of younger siblings, farming, and other household work;
- financial factors such as the cost of clothing and school supplies and the opportunity cost of the girls' lost labor;
- physical factors such as the distance to the nearest school, road access to school, and the existence of separate latrines for girls and boys;
- educational factors such as the language of instruction (Lao, which is a barrier for many ethnic minority girls), relevance of the school curriculum, rigid school schedules, poor quality of instruction, the limited number of ethnic minority teachers, and inadequate school facilities;
- sociocultural factors, such as the level of parents' support, awareness of opportunities related to education, parents' education levels, and cultural traditions (including early marriage for girls).

The MDG Progress Report mentions several of these factors as challenges to the achievement of gender parity in education under MDG 3. These challenges are strongest for ethnic minority girls living in remote areas. However, there is evidence that attitudes toward girls' education are changing in ethnic minority communities. For example, a recent social assessment carried out in ethnic minority villages in Attapeu, Houaphanh, Luang Namtha, and Sekong found that most parents in the villages valued education for their children and that several village leaders had introduced incentives and sanctions to encourage parents to send both girls and boys to school. At the same time, the survey found that girls are more likely than boys to be embarrassed about not having proper school clothes to wear and about not performing well in front of their peers.<sup>28</sup> Girls' self-consciousness therefore can also discourage them from attending school.

In recent years, both the Government and external agencies have focused on improving girls' attendance in primary school. However, MDG 3 (Target 4) aims to eliminate gender gaps in all levels of education by 2015. The MDG Progress Report therefore notes the importance of encouraging girls to complete primary school and go on to secondary school. In light of the high dropout rates among girls, nonformal education and skill training are also essential to ensure that adolescent girls have the basic literacy and life skills to make informed choices. This is especially important as more young women migrate from remote areas to towns and cities for work. Young ethnic minority women with little education and limited knowledge of Lao language will have few opportunities and will be at greater risk of exploitation.

### **c. Gender and Education Initiatives**

The Government's education strategy and the NGPES emphasize (i) increasing equitable access to education, (ii) improving the quality and relevance of education services, and (iii)

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<sup>28</sup> Gillespie, Anna. 2003. *Social Assessment for the World Bank EDP II — Second Education Development Project in the Lao PDR*. Vientiane.



strengthening education management.<sup>29</sup> The NGPES also includes supplemental goals to address gender disparities in enrollment, especially in the northern region. These include (a) increasing the availability, quality and relevance of primary and secondary education for poor and ethnic minority girls; (b) ensuring that vocational and technical school programs are accessible to poor and ethnic minority women; and (c) scaling up successful approaches to nonformal education that are particularly beneficial to women. Several of the general priorities in the NGPES also are likely to improve girls' school attendance such as increasing the number of qualified ethnic minority teachers, improved training for teachers in bilingual and multi-grade teaching, and development of more locally relevant teaching materials. The NGPES also includes commitments to increase the share of national and provincial budgets for education, and to increase the proportion of education spending for recurrent costs such as teachers' salaries and instructional materials.

The gender strategy in the NRDS includes similar measures to increase girls' school attendance and to improve female literacy with spillover benefits for boys and households in general. These include:

- increasing the number of trained ethnic minority teachers, especially in primary schools;
- in-service training in bilingual and multi-grade teaching, especially for teachers in remote and ethnic minority areas;
- incentives and support to district education bureaus and teachers to develop locally relevant curriculum materials for primary schools;
- effective incentives for girls to attend primary and secondary school, especially in remote and ethnic minority areas;
- “bridge” courses to prepare young people—especially ethnic minority youth—for vocational and technical education programs;
- ensuring gender and ethnic balance in vocational and technical education programs;
- including functional literacy and numeracy skills in village-based health, extension, and small business support programs targeting women.

Several of these measures are already being tested and implemented in projects such as the ADB-supported Basic Education (Girls) Project and Second Education Quality Improvement Project, the Lao-Australia Basic Education Project, the Teacher Upgrading Project (supported by UNICEF), Primary Education for Girls and Boys in Remote Areas of Laos (supported by the World Food Programme) and the Lao-German Programme on Occupation-Oriented Basic and Further Training for Target Groups from the Informal Sector .

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<sup>29</sup> Ministry of Education. 2000. *Education Strategic Vision up to the Year 2020*. Vientiane; Ministry of Education. 2002. *Education Strategic Planning: 20 Year, 10 Year and 5 Year Development Plan for Education*. Vientiane.

## 2. Health

### a. National Trends and Targets on Health

Lao PDR has made progress in a number of key health indicators. (See Table 4.) However, it still falls behind most other countries in the region. For example, between 1990 and 2000, the maternal mortality rate declined from 750 to 530 per 100,000 live births, but this is still one of the highest rates in Asia. The maternal mortality rate in rural areas—580—is substantially higher. The PPA suggests that maternal deaths are higher still in the poorest villages; on average, villagers reported one maternal death per village in the year preceding the assessment. The high maternal mortality levels in rural areas can be attributed to several factors: the greater distances to health centers and hospitals; the lower percentage of villages with trained medical practitioners; the scarcity of female health workers in health centers; the language barriers faced by ethnic minority women in seeking health services; and early marriage and high fertility rates in these areas.<sup>30</sup> Young women and women who have frequent pregnancies are especially vulnerable. Contraceptive use has increased, but the Reproductive Health Survey 2000 found that only 32% of married couples were using family planning methods. Moreover, 40% of couples wanted but did not have access to family planning with a higher percentage in rural areas.<sup>31</sup> The survey also found that 76% of recently pregnant women had received no antenatal care, and 86% still delivered at home. There has been a slight increase in the proportion of deliveries assisted by skilled health personnel, but women who experience complications during delivery also need access to emergency obstetric services (for example, to stop hemorrhage).

Between 1990 and 2000, infant and child mortality rates also dropped substantially, but they remained higher in rural and remote areas. Many infant and child deaths are caused by malaria, respiratory infections, diarrhea, dengue fever, measles, and meningitis. Although immunization programs are recognized as extremely cost-effective, the immunization coverage of one-year-olds actually dropped during the late 1990s. Impregnated bed nets also provide very cost-effective protection from malaria, but 40% of households in malaria-prone areas still do not have them. (See Table 4.)

One of the justifications for relocating upland villages to lowland areas is to improve villagers' access to health care facilities, schools, and markets. However, the resettlement process itself entails substantial relocation costs and disrupts food production, other livelihood activities, and social structures. There is also evidence of sharp increases in mortality rates in villages that have recently relocated. For example, a recent survey in Luang Namtha found that relocated

<sup>30</sup> The national fertility rate has declined from 5.6 in 1995 to 4.9 in 2000, but higher rates are still found in rural areas. Consistent with studies conducted elsewhere, the fertility rate declines with increasing years of education. NSC 2001. However, further decreases in fertility rates are hampered by the limited availability and use of family planning services, particularly in rural areas.

<sup>31</sup> NSC. 2001. The survey also found that 24% of rural women had never heard of contraceptives, and 36% had never heard of HIV/AIDS.

villages had an average mortality rate of 4 (per 100 in the population) compared with an average rate of 2.32 in upland villages and 0.78 in lowland villages.<sup>32</sup>

**Table 4: Millennium Development Goals and National Targets on Health**

<b>MDG 4: Reduce Child Mortality</b>			
<b>Target 5: Reduce by two-thirds the under-five mortality rate</b>			
Indicators:	Lao PDR Baseline	Recent Status	2015 Target
13: Under-five mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births)	170 (1990)	106 (2000)	55
14: Infant mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births)	134 (1990)	82 (2000)	45
15: Proportion of one-year-old children immunized	62% (1996)	42% (2000)	90%
<b>MDG 5: Improve Maternal Health</b>			
<b>Target 6: Reduce by three-quarters the maternal mortality ratio</b>			
Indicators:	Lao PDR Baseline	Recent Status	2015 Target
16: Maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100,000 live births)	750 (1990)	530 (2000)	185
16a: Contraceptive prevalence rate	13% (1990)	32% (2000)	55%
17: Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel	14% (1994)	17% (2000)	80%
<b>MDG 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases</b>			
<b>Target 7: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS</b>			
Indicators:	Lao PDR Baseline	Recent Status	2015 Target
18a: HIV prevalence among commercial service women (15–24 years)	N/A	0.4% (2001)	<1%
19a: Proportion of women who have ever used a condom (15–24 years)	0.9% (1994)	0.7% (2000)	20%
20a: Proportion of women (15–24 years) who know how to prevent STDs (e.g., by using a condom)	N/A	32% (2000)	70%
<b>Target 8: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse incidence of malaria and other major diseases</b>			
21: Death rate associated with malaria (per 100,000)	9 (1990)	4 (2002)	0.2
21a: Morbidity rate due to malaria (suspected cases per year per 1,000)	44 (1990)	48 (2002)	15
22a: Proportion of population in malaria risk areas protected by impregnated bed nets	25% (1999)	60% (2002)	100%
23: Prevalence rate associated with TB (per 100,000)	144 (1990)	144 (1990)	50

Source: Lao PDR MDG Progress Report

<sup>32</sup> Romagy, Laurent and Steeve Daviau. 2003. *Synthesis of Reports on Resettlement in Long District, Luang Namtha Province, Lao PDR* (ACF report). A recent study of relocated villages in Luang Namtha and Sekong found similar evidence of high mortality rates related to outbreaks of disease and lack of adequate health services to deal with the outbreaks. Alton and Rattanavong, op. cit.

The reported prevalence of HIV in Lao PDR is low, currently estimated at around 0.06%. However, Lao PDR is surrounded by countries with high prevalence rates, and the increased mobility of people within the country and across its borders heightens the country's vulnerability to the disease.<sup>33</sup> The first HIV case was reported in 1990, and the first case of AIDS was identified in 1992. The MDG Progress Report notes that close to 1,100 cases were reported by April 2003, but the actual figure is likely to be higher. The groups considered most at risk of contracting AIDS include mobile groups such as truck drivers, police, military, migrant workers, government officials, development workers and business people who travel, sex workers, adolescents, and women whose husbands have multiple partners.<sup>34</sup> Recent sentinel surveillance has found increases in HIV prevalence among high-risk groups including truck drivers and women working in bars and nightclubs. STD infections in some high-risk groups are also approaching 50%, which further increases the risk of HIV infection.<sup>35</sup> Recent testing of 1,000 young people returning from seasonal work in Thailand found an HIV infection rate of over 6%.<sup>36</sup> Condom use and awareness of HIV/AIDS in the general population are also low, which increases the risk that HIV infections could spread quickly from high-risk individuals (such as truck drivers and migrant workers) to their spouses and partners.

The Government has set several ambitious targets linked to the health MDGs. (See Table 4.) It will be difficult for Lao PDR to achieve all of these targets, particularly when regional and ethnic differences in access to health care are considered. Reducing maternal mortality will be especially challenging in rural and remote areas, given the limited access to contraceptives, prenatal care, and health facilities.

#### **b. Gender Issues in Health Care**

Lao women are primarily responsible for their families' health care. However, their own health is compromised by strenuous work, frequent pregnancies, anemia and poor nutrition, malaria and other diseases, and inadequate or inaccessible health services especially in remote and rural areas. Rural women have limited awareness of sanitation and disease prevention which can negatively affect the health of their children. A large proportion of rural women still are unaware of modern contraceptives and of how to prevent HIV/AIDS and other STDs. Ethnic minority women are at a particular disadvantage because of language and cultural barriers that inhibit them from

<sup>33</sup> Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand and border provinces of PRC such as Yunnan have been contending for several years with HIV/AIDS epidemics, and Viet Nam now faces a possible epidemic especially among injecting drug users and sex workers. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and WHO. 2003. *AIDS Epidemic Update*. Geneva.

<sup>34</sup> National Committee for Control of AIDS (NCCA). *HIV/AIDS Country Profile: Lao PDR 2000*. Vientiane; Supang Chantavanich with Allan Beesey and Shakti Paul. 2000. *Mobility and HIV/AIDS in the GMS* (ADB TA 5881-REG). Bangkok.

<sup>35</sup> NGPES; Family Health International. 2003. *HIV Surveillance Survey and STD Periodic Prevalence Survey: Lao PDR 2001*. Arlington, Virginia.

<sup>36</sup> Lao PDR. 2003. *Report on the Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Combined Initial, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Report): Lao PDR* (CEDAW Report). CEDAW/C/LAO/1-5.

going to health centers and seeking help from health care providers. Food taboos and other traditional practices related to pregnancy and childbirth can also harm the health of women and their children. Women's health and health awareness therefore are critical not only for their well being and productivity but also for the health and well being of their families, especially infants and small children.

Women in Lao PDR are especially vulnerable to HIV/AIDS because of their generally low health status, lack of knowledge about STDs and HIV/AIDS, and limited power to negotiate condom use with male partners. In addition to high-risk groups such as sex workers, the wives of men who visit sex workers or who have a "second wife" are also at risk. Adolescents are also an increasingly vulnerable group, as large numbers of them travel to urban centers and to Thailand for work where they are more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior. Adolescent girls are especially at risk because they are perceived to be "healthy," and therefore are particularly attractive to the sex industry.

Domestic violence inflicts psychological as well as physical harm on its victims who are primarily women and children. This problem has not been widely investigated or openly discussed in Lao PDR. Violent behavior among family members has traditionally been viewed as an internal family matter, although some victims have sought help from village authorities. During 2003, both the LWU and the Gender and Development Group (an affiliation of about 20 NGOs) are conducted field research on domestic violence. The LWU also recently established a counseling center at its Vientiane office to assist women and girls who are victims of physical or sexual abuse. The Law on the Development and Protection of Women passed by the national Assembly in October 2004 includes provisions on the prevention of domestic violence, rights of victims, and measures to assist and protect them.

Human trafficking also causes physical and psychological harm, especially for victims who are forced into prostitution or sweatshop work. There is increasing concern that the expansion of road networks linking Lao PDR with neighboring countries will facilitate the trafficking of girls from remote areas to Thailand and other countries. Increased traffic along major roadways is also expected to increase the demand for sex workers at truck stops and other roadside establishments. These risks are discussed further in Chapter III.F. The Law on the Development and Protection of Women also includes provisions and penalties on trafficking of women and children.

### **c. Gender and Health Initiatives**

The Government's health strategy and the NGPES address gender concerns in virtually all of the country's major health care initiatives. These include improvements in primary health care in rural areas (with emphasis on strengthening the number and capacity of ethnic minority health workers), in mother-and-child health care promotion in rural areas, in immunizations, in control of malaria and other communicable diseases, in prevention of STDs and HIV/AIDS, and in improvements in water supply and environmental health.<sup>37</sup> The NGPES also stresses the

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<sup>37</sup> Ministry of Health. 2000. *Health Strategy up to the Year 2020*; Ministry of Health. 2002. *National Poverty Eradication Plan of the Health Sector from 2003-2005*. Vientiane; NGPES, op. cit.

importance of strengthening the role of women in the primary health care network, especially in remote rural areas. Under the NGPES, special efforts will be made to increase the number of female and ethnic minority health workers, to ensure gender balance in training programs for village health workers, and to increase women's representation on village health committees. The NGPES also proposes a greater role for the LWU in community mobilization on nutrition, birth spacing, and other reproductive health issues. As in the education sector, the NGPES recognizes the need to increase national and provincial health care budgets and to ensure adequate funding of recurrent expenditures such as health workers' salaries.

The HIV/AIDS/STD Policy of Lao PDR, and its National Plan of Action for HIV/AIDS/STD (2002-2005), recognize that the country's fragile health care system could not cope with a full-scale AIDS epidemic. Therefore, they emphasize prevention and behavior modification. The policy and plan take a multi-sectoral and rights-based approach, involving central ministries and provincial and district government offices, mass organizations, the private sector, external agencies, and NGOs. Priorities in the national plan include prevention of HIV among service women, mobile populations, and youth; STD prevention and treatment; condom promotion; prevention of mother-child transmission of HIV; and prevention of HIV among the general population and ethnic minorities.<sup>38</sup>

The gender strategy in the NRDS includes similar measures to respond to the health needs and constraints of women, especially ethnic minority women. These include:

- training and promoting more women and ethnic minorities at all levels, especially provincial and district-level staff and health care providers at district and village levels;
- upgrading the skills of village health workers and increasing the number of women representatives on village health committees;
- ensuring gender and ethnic balance in all in-service and specialized training for health staff and health care providers;
- providing appropriate incentive packages for health care workers assigned to remote districts and villages;
- using radio and other media to promote health education to men and youth as well as women in rural and ethnic minority areas, especially relating to family planning and prevention of STDs and HIV infection;
- expanding access to reproductive health services, especially for ethnic minority women, through village health workers and mobile health units;
- improving emergency obstetric care at district and provincial hospitals;
- production of HIV/AIDS awareness materials in Chinese and Vietnamese for circulation to migrant construction workers, trucker operators, and traders;
- cooperation with provinces of neighboring countries (for example, to promote HIV/AIDS awareness at border crossings and nearby markets and truck stops);
- cooperation with private sector businesses and associations (for example, construction contractors, trucker associations, travel companies, hotels, and beer/beverage

<sup>38</sup> NCCA. 2001. *HIV/AIDS/STD Policy*. Vientiane; UNAIDS. *UN Joint Plan of Action and Common Strategy in Support of the National Response on HIV/AIDS/STI in Lao PDR (2002-2005)*. Vientiane.

distributors) to educate their employees, to provide HIV/AIDS information to their customers, and to support social marketing of condoms.

Several of these measures are already being pursued in the ADB-supported Primary Health Care Expansion Project and other health projects and programs supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the European Union, the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and other bilateral agencies, international NGOs, and the LWU. The National Plan of Action for HIV/AIDS/STDs is being supported by a large number of external agencies and NGOs, many of which participate in the UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS and contribute to the HIV/AIDS Trust set up in 1998. As mentioned in Chapter III.D, STD and HIV/AIDS risks are also increasingly identified in transport and other large infrastructure projects, including those supported by ADB.

### **3. Water Supply and Sanitation**

#### **a. National Trends and Targets on Water and Sanitation**

Clean water and sanitation services (WSS) are essential to public health. Considerable progress has been made in recent years to expand and improve WSS in Lao PDR. For example, between 1990 and 2002, the proportion of the population with access to a safe water source increased from 28% to 58%. (See Table 5.) However, access varies substantially between urban and rural areas and among provinces. For example, the LECS 3 found that only 24% of people in rural areas without road access have a safe water source. The NGPES notes that less than 40% of households and less than 10% of primary schools have sanitary latrines. The MDG progress report also notes that the WSS in provincial towns are much less reliable than in Vientiane. Even where water sources are relatively safe, water often becomes contaminated during collection or storage in households.

The Government has set ambitious targets for expanding and improving WSS. Under the NGPES, 75% of poor districts should have access to clean water and 55% should have sanitation by 2010. By 2015, 80% of the population should have sustainable access to clean water, and 70% of the [urban] population should have improved sanitation.<sup>39</sup> (See Table 5.) More primary schools will also be outfitted with sanitary latrines. However, these targets will be difficult to reach, especially in remote provinces.

#### **b. Gender Issues in Water and Sanitation**

The gender benefits of WSS are well recognized. Women and girls in rural Lao PDR, as in most rural societies, are mainly responsible for collecting water for household use and can spend a substantial amount of time at this task if the local water source is a distance away. Women are also primarily responsible for their families' health. Therefore, potable water and sanitation services are extremely important in minimizing illnesses from water-borne diseases. Women's own health also

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<sup>39</sup> The NGPES does not include a national 2015 target for improved sanitation. The 2015 target included in the MDG progress report (70%) appears to apply only to urban areas.

depends on clean water as bathing in dirty water increases the risk of reproductive tract and other infections.

**Table 5: Millennium Development Goal 7 and National Targets on Water and Sanitation**

<b>MDG 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability</b>			
<b>Target 10: Halve by 2015 the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water</b>			
<b>Indicators:</b>	<b>Lao PDR Baseline</b>	<b>Recent Status</b>	<b>2015 Target</b>
30: Proportion of population with sustainable access to an improved water source	28% (1990)	58% (2002)	80%
31a: Proportion of [urban] population with access to improved sanitation	11% (1990)	42% (1998)	70%

Source: Lao PDR MDG Progress Report

### c. Gender and Water/Sanitation Initiatives

The Government has included gender considerations in its National Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Strategy that is implemented by the National Center for Environmental Health and Water Supply (Nam Saat) under the Ministry of Health. Over the last several years, Nam Saat has made considerable progress in implementing a community-based, participatory, and gender-sensitive approach to rural WSS. Nam Saat's participatory approach to rural WSS includes community dialogue and consensus building on the most cost-effective, appropriate WSS technology for a particular village; formation of gender-balanced community user groups; consensus on village agreements relating to WSS construction, maintenance, and use; women's and men's contributions of labor during construction; and promotion of good hygiene practices in villages and schools. Nam Saat's strategy also includes efforts to improve the gender balance within central, provincial, and district Nam Saat staff, staff training in gender awareness and sensitivity, and collection and analysis of data disaggregated by sex. Provinces such as Oudomxay have established their own gender plans to make progress in these areas.<sup>40</sup> Nam Saat's participatory approach has been supported by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the World Bank, UNICEF, and others. The social action plan under the ADB-supported Northern Economic Corridor Project also supports Nam Saat's programs in Luang Namtha and Bokeo.

In urban areas, the national water supply company, Nam Papa Lao, is responsible for the supply of WSS. Community-based and gender-sensitive approaches are increasingly used in urban development projects, including improvements in WSS facilities. These include the ADB-supported Vientiane Urban Infrastructure and Services Project and the Small Towns Development Sector Project. Both of these projects include gender strategies to ensure that women participate in project activities and that the projects address women's needs as household managers and small business owners.

<sup>40</sup> National Center for Environmental Health and Water Supply. 2001. *Moving Gender Strategy into Practice: Steps Taken in the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Sector in Lao PDR*. Vientiane.



#### **4. International Commitments on Gender and Human Development**

The NGPES and the Government's strategies on education and health also further Lao PDR's international commitments to promote gender equality in human development. For example, Article 10 of CEDAW requires Lao PDR and other state parties to, "...take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education." Article 12 requires state parties to, "...take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care," with particular attention to family planning services and pregnancy, confinement, and post-natal care. Article 14 calls for attention to the needs of rural women, including adequate health care facilities, formal and informal education and training to achieve functional literacy, and adequate living conditions including sanitation and water supply.

The development of women's capabilities is also highlighted in the Beijing Platform for Action endorsed by Lao PDR and other countries in 1995. Education and training, health care and related services, and violence against women are among the twelve areas of concern in the platform. The platform is extremely comprehensive, and highlights the needs of rural, indigenous, and migrant women and girls. The platform also stresses the importance of sensitizing men and boys on sharing household duties, preventing unwanted pregnancies and STDs, and not engaging in sexual harassment and violent behavior toward women and girls. Its strategic objectives include the following.

##### **Education and Training of Women**

- ensure equal access to education;
- eradicate illiteracy among women;
- improve women's access to vocational training;
- develop non-discriminatory education and training;
- allocate sufficient resources for and monitoring implementation of education reforms;
- promote lifelong education and training for women and girls.

##### **Women and Health**

- increase women's access to appropriate, affordable, and quality health care;
- strengthen preventive programs that promote women's health;
- undertake gender-sensitive initiatives that address STDs, HIV/AIDS, and sexual and reproductive health;
- promote research and disseminate information on women's health;
- Increase resources for monitoring women's health.

##### **Violence Against Women**

- take integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women;
- study the causes and consequences of violence against women and the effectiveness of preventive measures;
- eliminate trafficking in women and assist victims of violence from prostitution and trafficking.

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development that Lao PDR and other countries adopted in Cairo in 1994 also emphasizes gender equality, women's empowerment, and human resource development as essential to the success of both population and development programs. The Programme recommends that countries provide universal access to health care (including family planning services and other aspects of reproductive health care), eliminate violence against women, and ensure that women control their own fertility. The Programme also stresses the importance of formal and nonformal education to expand women's and girls' life choices, encourage later marriage and birth spacing, and thereby improve the health of women and their children. The Programme highlights the specific needs of adolescents, indigenous people, and migrants, and emphasizes the importance of involving men in family planning and prevention of STDs.

The Cairo Programme of Action strongly influenced the National Population and Development Policy of Lao PDR that was adopted in May 1999. Following the recommendations in the Programme, the National Population and Development Policy included time-bound targets for reductions of maternal, infant, and child mortality and the total fertility rate and for improvements in contraceptive prevalence, girls' school enrollments, and women's literacy. Updated versions of several of these targets are included in the national targets to achieve the MDGs.

The NGPES stresses the importance of supporting women's and men's traditional livelihood strategies, while also expanding their opportunities for alternative income and employment. For 80% of the Lao population living in rural areas, their livelihoods are still dependent on agriculture and some off-farm activities. Rural women are especially resourceful in diversifying their economic activities to include foraging, gardening, raising small livestock, and producing handicrafts in addition to growing rice, collecting fuel and water, and performing other household tasks. These livelihood activities are essential to poor households' food security and general well being. They are also important for meeting the Government's targets to reduce poverty and hunger, and thereby make progress toward MDG 1 (see Table 2). The NGPES also supports the development of small and medium-sized businesses that provide opportunities for women as both entrepreneurs and employees. Expanding work opportunities for women outside the agricultural sector also furthers the national goals of gender equality and women's empowerment reflected in MDG 3.<sup>41</sup>

### **C. Gender, Livelihoods, and Employment**

In Lao PDR, about 70% of the population 10 years and older is economically active. Over 80% of economically active people work in agriculture and fishing mainly for subsistence (see Table 6). Women represent over 50% of the working population, and a majority of agriculturalists, service workers, and office workers. They represent over 40% of craft workers (and the vast

<sup>41</sup> The indicators for achievement of MDG 3 include, in addition to school enrollment and literacy ratios of girls to boys, the share of women in wage employment in the nonagricultural sector. National targets for gender parity in school enrollment and literacy are discussed in Chapter III.B.1. The Government is currently considering a 2015 target for the wage employment indicator as well.

majority of handicraft workers), almost 40% of technicians (including health workers and teaching associates), and one third of professionals. However, just over 10% of company managers are women, and very few women hold senior government or legislative positions.<sup>42</sup>

**Table 6: Lao Occupations**

Occupation Group	Total	Male		Female	
		Number	%	Number	%
Legislators and Senior Officials	5,261	5,167	98%	94	2%
Managers	4,193	3,706	88%	487	12%
Professionals	26,861	17,878	67%	8,983	33%
Technicians	62,568	38,517	62%	24,051	38%
Clerks	5,249	2,378	45%	2,871	55%
Service Workers	85,713	36,899	43%	48,814	57%
Agriculture and Fishery Workers	1,852,686	849,066	46%	1,003,620	54%
Crafts and Related Trade Workers	55,930	33,129	59%	22,801	41%
Operators and Assemblers	21,195	20,429	96%	766	4%
Elementary Occupations	25,295	18,329	72%	6,966	28%
Other Occupations	21,231	19,632	92%	1,599	8%
<b>All Occupations</b>	<b>2,166,192</b>	<b>1,045,137</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>1,121,055</b>	<b>52%</b>

Source: Lao PDR Population Census 1995

The following subheadings review national trends and gender issues in three areas that are particularly relevant to Lao women: agriculture, small businesses, and wage employment. The discussion draws heavily on the NRDS gender strategy.

## **1. Agriculture and Related Activities**

### **a. National Trends**

With over 80% of the working population engaged in subsistence agriculture, improvements in the agricultural sector are critical to the Government's goals of poverty reduction and national development. The NGPES therefore places high priority on the Government's development plan for the sector. This plan stresses (i) food security and food self-sufficiency; (ii) reducing vulnerability to drought, floods, livestock diseases, and other risks; (iii) increasing the value of agricultural products; and (iv) increasing rural incomes from agroprocessing.

The NGPES reports steady increases in agricultural production over the past decade. However, most of the increase has occurred in lowland areas where paddy rice and other crops are grown and where farmers have access to agricultural support services and markets. In contrast, farmers in upland areas continue to grow dry-land rice using shifting cultivation techniques. Population pressure and the Government's land-forest allocation program have restricted the land

<sup>42</sup> However, the number of women elected to the National Assembly has tripled since 1995 and now stands at 23%.

available for upland farming and shortened fallow periods resulting in declining rice yields. The hardships of upland farmers are exacerbated by the lack of agricultural support services and limited access to markets. Government efforts to eradicate opium cultivation in upland areas have also increased hardships for ethnic minority communities that depended on the opium crop for cash income. The Government's agriculture strategy therefore includes different approaches for lowland and upland areas: a market-based approach for lowland areas including promotion of cash crops and more value-added processing and a more proactive approach for upland areas including improved land-use zoning, extension services, and market access.

### **b. Gender Issues in Agriculture**

Rural women play vital roles as farmers and agroprocessors, raisers of small livestock, harvesters of non-timber forest products (NTFPs), producers of handicrafts and other non-farm products, and traders. Gender roles in agriculture can vary considerably, often related to ethnicity, location, type of farming system, use of technology, and other factors. Gender roles are also changing rapidly as more farming households diversify into cash crops, as communities relocate from upland areas to amalgamated villages closer to roads and towns, and as Government policies change the allocation of rural land and influence farming practices.

More Lao women are active in agriculture and fisheries than men. However, women have historically had little direct access to agricultural extension, veterinary care for their livestock, credit, marketing information, or other inputs except in projects supported by external agencies and NGOs where specific provisions have been made for women's participation. Ethnic minority women have even less access to agricultural services because they are more likely to live in remote areas, many cannot speak or read Lao, and they have limited contact with extension officers and other outsiders who deal mainly with the male members of their communities.

General trends in the Lao agricultural sector may affect women and men differently, especially in poor and ethnic minority communities. These trends include the implementation of land allocation and land titling policies, policies to stabilize shifting cultivation and reduce opium cultivation, and policies to promote new technologies and commercial agriculture. The gender dimensions of some of these trends are noted briefly below.

There is considerable variation in land tenure and inheritance practices among ethnic groups. For example, among ethnic Lao, the family home and some paddy land typically are inherited by the child who has taken care of the aging parents, often the youngest daughter. However, among the Hmong, women have no traditional right to inherit land.<sup>43</sup> Rural communities have also developed unique rules and practices governing use of common land and access to forest land. National laws, decrees, and policies of Lao PDR increasingly affect rural land tenure and use, often in tension with traditional land practices and with different impacts on women and men.

<sup>43</sup> However, a recent study under the Lao-Swedish Forestry Programme found a number of variations in inheritance rules within the same ethnic groups, including reports of daughters inheriting land even in some upland ethnic communities. Rodenburg, Hermien and Chansamone Phengkhay. 2000. *Special Study: Social and Gender Impacts of Land Allocation*. Vientiane.

Traditional land practices are also changing in response to increasing population pressure on arable land, the interest of many farmers in growing cash crops and fruit trees as well as rice, and other factors.<sup>44</sup> During the preparation of the 1997 Land Law, the LWU lobbied to protect ethnic Lao women's traditional right to inherit family land and jointly own land acquired with household resources.<sup>45</sup> As a result, the Land Law provides that the names of both husband and wife are recorded in the land register. Considerable attention also was paid to gender awareness in the preparation of the original land titling project.<sup>46</sup> Recent studies have suggested that greater attention also needs to be paid to gender issues in the allocation of agricultural and forest land, especially in non-Lao ethnic areas.<sup>47</sup> These issues are discussed further in Chapter IV.B .

The Government's land-forest allocation program is closely tied to a number of other policies and programs including the stabilization of shifting cultivation practices, reduction of opium cultivation, focal site development and promotion of more commercial approaches to agriculture and agroforestry. Ongoing studies in Luang Prabang and Oudomxay are providing valuable insights into the links between these policies, local conditions, and gender dimensions of land use. For example, the studies confirm the PPA findings that the land-forest allocation program has severely reduced the fallow periods for upland farmers, leading to reduced soil fertility and declining rice yields. This particularly affects women farmers who spend much more time clearing fallows of weeds but experience even lower rice yields. Consequently, they must rely on harvesting of NTFPs, sale of livestock, and other strategies to meet their households' food needs. Women interviewed in one district, for example, expressed their strong desire to switch from backbreaking upland rice farming to paddy farming, livestock raising, weaving, and trading. However, they complained of the severe shortage of paddy land and the need for extension and other support for alternative income-generating activities. At the same time, women and men in the study areas are working constructively to cope with land shortages, depletion of NTFPs and other problems. Their coping strategies include diversification of activities, informal land exchanges and efforts to sustainably cultivate NTFPs such as red mushrooms.<sup>48</sup> Women's and men's livelihood activities are especially strained in relocated villages where there is not enough land for all of the relocated households, and where water and forest resources are insufficient for the growing village population.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Some of these changes in the traditional land practices of a sample of ethnic Lao, Khmou, and Hmong villages were identified in a recent study under the land Titling Project supported by the World Bank and AusAID. Lao Consulting Group. 2002. *Lao PDR Land Titling Project (IDA Loan Credit 2832 LA): Existing Land Tenure and Forest Lands Study*. Vientiane.

<sup>45</sup> Viravong, Manivone. 1999. "Reforming Property Rights in Laos," in *Women's Rights to House and Land: China, Laos, Vietnam*, edited by Irene Tinker and Gale Summerfield. Boulder and London.

<sup>46</sup> Schenk-Sandbergen, Loes, Hermien Rodenburg and Chansamone Phengkhay. 1997. *Land, Gender and Social Issues in Lao PDR: Towards Gender Sensitive Land Titling*. Vientiane.

<sup>47</sup> Rodenburg and Phengkhay, op. cit.

<sup>48</sup> Lao Swedish Upland Agriculture and Forestry Research Programme (LSURP). 2003. *Report on the Diagnostic Survey in Phonsay District and Report on the Diagnostic Survey in Namo District* (drafts). Vientiane; LSURP. 2002. *Research Report – Land Management Component on Land Use Planning and Socio Economic Issues in Phonsay and Nam Mo Districts*. Vientiane.

<sup>49</sup> Alton and Rattanavong, op. cit.

Changes in agricultural practices—for example, increased mechanization and shifts from subsistence to commercial agriculture—change the gender division of labor and gender relations. In these instances, men typically assume greater control of land, farming equipment and marketing of crops, although women’s investments of cash and labor are often essential to the success of the ventures. For example, field studies have found that the replacement of buffaloes with power tillers reduced women’s workloads to some extent. However, the change also increased the decision-making power of male household members who assumed control over the machines, although the women had been responsible for raising much of the cash needed to purchase the tillers. Similarly, men have assumed the dominant role in water user associations formed to operate and maintain new irrigation facilities, although the cash needed to pay water user fees often comes from the trading and other productive activity of women in the community.<sup>50</sup> Men also tend to take control of women’s traditional livelihood activities such as rice milling and the raising of small livestock once the process is mechanized or external resources are provided.<sup>51</sup>

Women farmers are also hampered by the small number of female and ethnic minority extension workers. Particularly in ethnic minority villages, women are unlikely to engage with male, Lao-speaking extension workers, even when the extension advice and inputs relate to the women’s own livelihood activities and areas of expertise. Yet project evaluations confirm that providing extension training and technology only to male farmers does not guarantee that the information and inputs will reach the household members who can most effectively use them.<sup>52</sup>

### c. Gender and Agricultural Initiatives

The NGPES includes a number of measures to better support women farmers’ productive capacity and local knowledge. These include (i) use of gender-related data and needs assessments in agricultural research and project planning; (ii) inclusion of women in project activities, extension, and training; (iii) use of gender-related indicators to monitor projects; (iv) increases in the number of female extension workers; (v) women farmers as gender focal points in villages to promote improved agricultural practices; (vi) sensitivity to women’s traditional rights in land reallocation, land titling, and resolution of land disputes; and (vii) assistance to women in accessing

<sup>50</sup> Schenk-Sandbergen, Loes and Outhaki Choulamany-Khamphoui. 1995. *Women in Rice Fields and Offices: Irrigation in Laos*. Heiloo, Netherlands.

<sup>51</sup> For example, a study in Luang Prabang found that even when rice mills were provided to villages specifically for women’s use, they were initially controlled by village men until the provincial LWU and local officials intervened. Ireson-Doolittle and Moreno-Black, op. cit. Similarly, in a livestock project in Luang Namtha and Luang Prabang, over 60% of the model chicken and pig farms supported by the project are managed by men, although the raising of chickens and pigs has usually been considered “women’s work.” de Koning, Mirjam. 2002. *Rural Credit to Promote Pig and Poultry Production in Northern Lao PDR* (SUNV report). Luang Prabang.

<sup>52</sup> For example, the final project report from a forest development project in Luang Prabang in the 1980s found that the project had had no discernable impact on the upland land management practices of villages in the project area. This was explained in part because, “...the trained men did not share their training and technology with other members of their families, so the women (who have major responsibilities in upland farming systems and in fruit production) continued their work and farm management as before.” Ireson-Doolittle and Moreno-Black, op. cit.

rural savings and credit schemes. Several of the general priorities for agriculture in the NGPES will also benefit rural women including programs to improve the health of small livestock, to promote sustainable harvesting of NTFPs, and to support market gardens in peri-urban areas.

The gender strategy in the NRDS includes similar measures to support women’s as well as men’s rural livelihood activities especially in remote and ethnic minority communities. These include:

- collecting data disaggregated by sex and consulting with both male and female farmer groups to plan extension and other project activities;
- including women in project activities through mixed farmer groups (including water user groups) or women’s groups, as appropriate;
- ensuring that women farmers receive extension services, for example, by training husband-wife “model farmer” teams and arranging village-based training for women farmers to accommodate their work schedules;
- increasing the number of female extension workers in the field, for example, by hiring husband-wife extension teams, especially from ethnic minority groups, and providing effective incentives to work in remote areas;
- increasing the number of women and ethnic minority staff in provincial and district land offices, and including community and gender awareness activities in the land-forest allocation program administered by district forestry offices;
- paying special attention to the vaccination of small livestock (identified as a priority in the PPA);
- supporting rural women’s livelihood activities such as community-based agro-processing, cultivation and sustainable harvesting of NTFPs, and market gardens;
- using radio and other media to provide better market information to small farmers and agroprocessors, especially women.

These and other gender-sensitive approaches are included in the ADB-supported Nam Ngum River Basin Development Sector Project and Decentralized Irrigation Development and Management Sector Project, and in rural development projects supported by the World Bank, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the European Union (EU), the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), other external agencies and international nongovernment organizations (NGOs).

## **2. Small Businesses**

### **a. National Trends**

According to a recent study supported by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), over 98% of manufacturing businesses in Lao PDR are micro and small businesses, and about 75% are grain milling businesses with fewer than two employees.<sup>53</sup> The

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<sup>53</sup> Tas, Nilgun F. and Sengxay Phousinghoa. 2002. *Small and Medium Sized Enterprise Development Framework* (Draft No. 2 – Working Paper). Vientiane.

UNIDO study also found that the vast majority of tax-registered businesses are sole traders. According to the LECS 3, 28% of Lao households operate at least one household business (67% of urban households and 17% of rural households).<sup>54</sup> Another recent study finds that the non-farm and off-farm business activities of rural households such as weaving, handicraft production and fish processing are generally more productive than agriculture and can generate more than half of total household income.<sup>55</sup>

The Government of Lao PDR places considerable emphasis on strengthening the country's business environment through support of the private sector, including promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and foreign direct investment. SME development therefore is a priority in the NGPES. An SME decree was recently prepared with technical assistance from UNIDO. ADB is supporting implementation of the decree finalized in 2004.<sup>56</sup>

One of the main constraints facing small businesses in Lao PDR is the limited access to credit and savings services. In recent years, more rural development programs have included microfinance components to assist microenterprises and also to address the food security needs of poor households. These often have taken the form of village revolving funds. Commodity banks (e.g., rice and livestock banks) have also been established at the village level mainly for the benefit of poor households.<sup>57</sup> However, many of these village funds and commodity banks have operated on a small scale and have been linked to specific development programs. Therefore, they generally have had limited reach and sustainability. Recently, UNDP and the United Nations Capital Development Fund developed a proposal to establish a national microfinance institution modeled on microfinance programs they had supported in several provinces.<sup>58</sup> ADB is also supporting the establishment of pilot credit unions in selected areas.<sup>59</sup> Building on these and other proposals, the Government is developing a general regulatory framework for microfinance institutions.

## **b. Gender Issues in Small Business**

In all regions of Lao PDR, women traditionally have been responsible for rice milling, and many women have translated this traditional household activity into small businesses through the acquisition of rice mills. Women are actively involved in other types of agroprocessing as well as weaving, handicraft production, and small-scale trading. Women from several ethnic groups are

<sup>54</sup> The percentages are higher if all households with registered business income (such as rural households that produce textiles for sale) are included. By this measure, 46% of households have "business activities" (68% of urban and 38% of rural households). LECS 3, op. cit.

<sup>55</sup> Keomixay, Souphanh et al. 2003. "Off-farm and Non-farm Employment and Activities in the Lao PDR," in *Off-farm and Non-farm Employment in Southeast Asian Transitional Economies and Thailand*. Phnom Penh.

<sup>56</sup> ADB. 2003. Technical Assistance to Lao PDR for *Advisory Assistance on Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises and Private Sector Development*. Manila.

<sup>57</sup> UNDP and United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF). 1997. *Microfinance in Rural Lao PDR: A National Profile*. Vientiane.

<sup>58</sup> UNDP and UNCDF. 2001. *Microfinance and Sustainable Livelihood: Feasibility Study Mission Report*. Vientiane.

<sup>59</sup> ADB. 2000. Technical Assistance to Lao PDR for *Rural Finance Development* (TA Cluster). Manila.



also increasingly involved in commercial weaving and embroidery activities and have established relationships with buyers in Thailand and overseas markets.<sup>60</sup> A 1995 survey of SMEs found that women own and operate over 60% of registered small businesses in Lao PDR, and the percentage may be higher in some urban areas.<sup>61</sup> According to the LECS 3, 53% of household businesses are operated by women (62% in urban and 43% in rural areas).

Although women are active in the Lao private sector, they face a number of constraints as business owners. For example, the 1995 survey of SMEs found that women's enterprises tend to have fewer assets and less revenue than men's, and the average loan received by women entrepreneurs is substantially smaller. The recent UNIDO study also noted that women entrepreneurs are especially hampered by cumbersome procedures for registering their businesses. Because of gender biases among bank officers and collateral requirements, women business owners are likely to have less access to financial services and must rely on alternative sources such as moneylenders and suppliers to meet working capital needs. Because of their lack of political voice, women business owners can also be more vulnerable to arbitrary treatment by tax authorities and other government officials. Business licenses and taxes are especially burdensome for micro and small enterprises because they have little working capital to draw on, especially to pay fees and taxes in advance.<sup>62</sup> Women entrepreneurs in rural areas, for example, handicraft producers, also lack direct access to market information and are therefore at a disadvantage in negotiating prices with traders.

A recent study of gender issues in micro and small enterprises by GRID and the ILO, including a field survey of 250 entrepreneurs (150 women and 100 men) in five provinces, made similar findings.<sup>63</sup> These include the following.

- Women's businesses tend to be smaller than men's in terms of productive assets, total investment and sales.
- Women are more likely to select a business that they can run from home and that does not require a large amount of capital.

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<sup>60</sup> Ireson-Doolittle and Moreno-Black, op. cit.; Kosakabe, Kyoko. 2003. "Definition of Women's Work and Market Hierarchy in the Borderland of Lao PDR." Paper presented at British International Studies Association Conference, 15–17 December 2003, University of Birmingham.

<sup>61</sup> Ministry of Industry and Handicrafts and GTZ. 1996. *Results of a National Survey: Small and Medium Enterprises in the Lao PDR*. Vientiane; Choulamany-Khamphoui, Outhaki. 2001. "Market Women of Vientiane: Success and Stagnation." Paper presented at Gender and Indochina Conference, 3–4 March 2001, Bangkok (author estimates that women represent about 90% of registered business owners in Vientiane market area).

<sup>62</sup> For example, the export tax introduced in 2000 was extremely burdensome for small exporters such as individual cotton weavers who could only afford to pay the tax per piece. In contrast, larger exporters were able to pay the tax in advance on a monthly basis and benefited from a much lower effective tax rate. Kusakabe, op. cit.

<sup>63</sup> LWU/GRID and ILO. 2004. *Gender Issues in Micro and Small Enterprises in the Lao PDR*. Vientiane.

- Most women sought the help of a male relative to establish their businesses, but both women and men rely on family members in running their businesses.
- Both women and men were hampered in starting their businesses by the lack of finance and marketing, but women also reported problems related to gender bias, restrictions on their mobility, and family/social issues.
- Women depend primarily on their own labor and that of other family members; men are more likely to employ full-time workers outside their family.
- Women business owners make most business decisions on their own, but 30% rely on their husbands to sign legal documents.
- Women spend on average over 8 hours a day in their businesses and over 2 hours a day on household work for a total of almost 11 working hours; on average, men spend less time on both their businesses (over 7 hours) and household work (about 1 hour).
- Most businesses are registered in the owner's name; however, 25% of women's businesses are registered in the husband's name, and 17% are registered in both names. In contrast, only 10% of men's businesses are registered in the wife's name while 25% are registered jointly.
- Women are less informed than men about government policies and regulations related to small businesses.
- Both women and men are interested in obtaining finance for their businesses, but more women (27%) want business training, preferably short courses held in their villages. Other priorities for women in business include lower utility costs (e.g., electricity and water), simplified licensing and other regulatory requirements, and networking opportunities.

Many of the microfinance programs introduced in Lao PDR have been specifically intended to assist women's microenterprises. However, one study of rice banks and village revolving funds in some ethnic minority villages found that the funds were often co-opted by the most powerful families in the villages. The funds also were generally controlled by male village members, even when they related to women's traditional livelihood activities such as small livestock and embroidery.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, it is important to ensure that the Government's new regulatory framework for microfinance institutions and new institutions such as the credit unions supported by ADB respond to the needs and constraints of rural microentrepreneurs, especially women from ethnic minority groups who have least access to other forms of credit and savings. For poor and ethnic minority women, savings schemes may also be more useful than loans.

### **c. Gender and Small Business Initiatives**

A number of small-scale initiatives have been launched to promote women's enterprises, for example, in the weaving and handicraft sector. These ventures have been supported by a number of external agencies including the Canadian International Development Agency, the EU, GTZ, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), UNDP, and several NGOs. Producer cooperatives engaged in silk production have been

<sup>64</sup> Karkas, Eleni. 1999. *NGOs, Minority Women and Microfinance: Focus on the Lao PDR* (Concern Worldwide report).

particularly successful. The Lao Handicraft Group, one of the business groups in the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, includes a number of women's businesses. However, women entrepreneurs are not well represented in the National Chamber of Commerce as a whole. The Lao Trade Promotion Centre under the Ministry of Commerce has also supported the larger textile and weaving enterprises owned by women and has organized business training seminars for rural entrepreneurs (both women and men). The Vientiane Women's Business Association provides training and other support to women business owners in the Vientiane area. However, women's businesses in other parts of the country have no such support.

The NGPES supports measures to ensure that women and ethnic minorities participate fully in the private sector, particularly in SMEs. The NRDS also recognizes that private sector activities have gender dimensions. It therefore includes recommendations to ensure that the benefits of private sector development are equitably shared. These measures include:

- working jointly with the national authorities to simplify the registration, licensing, and taxation of micro and small businesses;
- considering the impact of trade rules and duties (and proposed changes in these rules) on micro and small businesses;
- providing market and storage facilities for small-scale traders at border crossings and in duty-free zones;
- improving market information systems for handicraft producers, agroprocessors and other small businesses, using radio, Internet, and other technologies;
- coordinating with the Bank of Lao PDR, the Agriculture Promotion Bank, LWU, external agencies, and NGOs to improve the financial services available to micro and small businesses, including savings programs that are accessible to poor and ethnic minority women;
- ensuring that women and ethnic minorities are represented in any provincial chambers of commerce, and that these associations respond to the needs of micro and small businesses.

The recent GRID/ILO study recommended that the institutions to be set up under the new SME decree address the needs of women business owners, for example, by establishing a gender focal point or gender division within the new national SME promotion office, and by establishing an SME promotion fund for which women entrepreneurs would be a priority target group. The study also recommended that (i) information on legal and regulatory requirements, business and market information, and sources of business training and credit be disseminated widely to micro and small entrepreneurs; (ii) business development services be extended to women in rural areas through village-based training; (iii) women's business groups or associations be developed and supported; and (iv) statistics on micro and small enterprises and women entrepreneurs in particular be updated regularly.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> LWU/GRID and ILO, op. cit.

### 3. Employment

The largest employers in Lao PDR are the Government and large manufacturing enterprises, most of which are government owned. However, the vast majority of private sector businesses have fewer than 10 employees, and these small businesses as a group employ a larger number of workers than the large enterprises. In recent years, larger private sector enterprises have been set up with foreign owners or partners including garment factories. Tourism and related services are also expanding, particularly in the municipalities of Vientiane and Luang Prabang. The Government is encouraging foreign investment and private sector development more generally in order to create more wage employment opportunities for its young population that adds another 50,000 to 80,000 workers to the labor force each year.<sup>66</sup>

Private sector development, particularly involving foreign investment, creates employment opportunities for women as well as men. For example, the vast majority of workers in Lao garment factories—most of which are foreign-owned—are young women. However, women and ethnic minorities may not benefit equitably from foreign investment if they are hired primarily for less-skilled, lower-paying jobs and have little opportunity to participate in in-house training programs and advance to higher positions. Women and ethnic minority workers are already at a disadvantage because of their lower education and skill levels. For example, women represent nearly 75% of seasonal and temporary employees but less than 15% of technicians in industrial establishments. Average wages for men in industry are almost two times higher than for women.<sup>67</sup>

Relative wages strongly influence the work and life choices that young Lao people make. A recent study found that young women can make substantially more money working in nightclubs or beer shops (and providing commercial sex) than working in a garment factory.<sup>68</sup> In its recent report to the CEDAW expert committee, the Government also noted that low factory wages have contributed to an increase in prostitution.<sup>69</sup> The CEDAW report explained that many female factory workers feel compelled to earn extra money to send home to their families by moonlighting in restaurants or nightclubs where they may be sexually exploited by customers.

Lao garment workers are also in a precarious position because of the phase-out of import quotas on textiles and clothing under the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (due to be completed by the end of 2004). This liberalization of the textile and clothing market will expose Lao garment manufacturers to greater competition with uncertain

<sup>66</sup> NSC and National Economic Research Institute (NERI). 2001. "The Labour Market in the Lao People's Democratic Republic," in *Labour Markets in Transitional Economies in Southeast Asia and Thailand*. Phnom Penh: Development Analysis Network.

<sup>67</sup> Upadhyaya, Shyam and Ittichai Yossri. 2000. *Survey of Industrial Establishments, 1999*. Vientiane.

<sup>68</sup> Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare and UNICEF. *How I Got Here: Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Lao PDR*. Vientiane. The study found that a garment factory worker earns about 100,000 to 200,000 kip a week while a girl can earn 100,000 to 400,000 kip a week (or 400,000 to 1,200,000 kip a month) as a sex worker.

<sup>69</sup> CEDAW Report, op. cit.

effects on jobs and wages in the sector. Limited job opportunities and low wages in Lao PDR already lead many young women to migrate to Thailand for work. As discussed further in Chapter III.F, these migrants typically end up in domestic service, small factories, and brothels where they work under harsh and exploitative conditions.

These trends highlight the importance of vocational and technical training, language training, and continuing education programs to raise the skill levels and improve job opportunities of Lao workers, especially young women and ethnic minority youth. The private sector is generally viewed as more capable of providing relevant business training. Targeted scholarships and student loans could assist young women, especially those from ethnic minority groups, to access private vocational/technical training programs in Lao PDR or neighboring countries in order to qualify themselves for better jobs.<sup>70</sup> Apprenticeships with development agencies or large private sector businesses, including on-the-job training, would also provide valuable skills and work experience to young women.<sup>71</sup>

The NRDS recommends similar measures to ensure that the benefits of private sector development are equitably shared. These include:

- ensuring gender and ethnic balance in vocational and technical education programs;
- providing “bridge” courses to prepare young women and ethnic minority youth for vocational and technical programs;
- encouraging large private sector companies to create apprenticeship programs for young women and ethnic minority youth to increase the pool of young people with the skills and work experience to participate in the market economy;
- encouraging large private sector businesses to promote gender equity and ethnic diversity in hiring, in in-house training, and in promotions.

As discussed further in Chapter IV.B, the 1994 Labour Law provides a basic framework for the protection of workers' rights and includes provisions on nondiscrimination, equal pay, work hours, minimum wages and overtime, benefits (including maternity leave and benefits), and safe working conditions. However, the law provides little protection to workers in practice, both because it does not specify penalties for violations or clear enforcement procedures, and because the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) as implementing agency has limited staff and resources to implement the law. Given the Government's emphasis on private sector development (including foreign investment), it will be increasingly important to strengthen the capacity of MLSW to implement and enforce the Labour Law. As a complementary measure, the Government

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<sup>70</sup> Knowles, James C. 2004. *Labor Market Assessment* (Report under ADB Small-scale Technical Assistance for Social Protection in the Lao PDR).

<sup>71</sup> ADB's country briefing paper on women proposed the creation of an internship and training program for young Lao women to help them gain employment in government offices, businesses, and organizations. More recently, the author of that study and other development specialists have proposed an apprenticeship and training program for young people from poor districts to work in community development projects in their own areas. Chagnon, Jacqueline. 2003. *Development Apprenticeship Program for Disadvantaged and Poor Rural Youth in the Lao PDR* (discussion paper).

and donors could also work with industry groups to develop codes of conduct on conditions of work.

#### **4. International Commitments on Gender, Livelihoods, and Employment**

The Government's support of gender equity measures in the agriculture sector and private sector enterprises also furthers Lao PDR's international commitments to promote gender equality in livelihoods and employment. For example, Article 11 of CEDAW requires Lao PDR and other state parties to (i) ensure equal rights between women and men in employment opportunities, job security and promotions, vocational training and retraining, equal pay and benefits for work of equal value, social security, and occupational health and safety; and (ii) prevent discrimination against women on the basis of marriage or maternity (including provision for maternity leave with pay or comparable benefits, social services for working parents, and protection of pregnant women from harmful work). Article 13(b) of CEDAW also requires state parties to ensure equal rights to bank loans, mortgages, and other forms of credit. Article 14, which addresses the problems of rural women, confirms their rights to training and education (both formal and informal), community and extension services, access to agricultural credit, marketing facilities, appropriate technology, and equal treatment in land reform and resettlement schemes.

As discussed in Chapter IV.A, Lao PDR has only ratified four ILO conventions. However, as an ILO member, Lao PDR is bound to enforce all of the core labor standards included in the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights of Work, including nondiscrimination in employment and equal pay for equivalent work.<sup>72</sup>

The enhancement of women's economic potential and economic security is also supported by the Beijing Platform for Action which Lao PDR and other countries endorsed in 1995. One of the twelve areas of concern in the Beijing Platform is women and the economy. Actions that governments committed to take in this area include promoting women's access to employment and appropriate working conditions; eliminating occupational segregation and employment discrimination; facilitating women's equal access to resources, markets, and trade; providing business services, training and access to markets, information, and technology especially for low-income women; and strengthening women's economic capacity and commercial networks.

#### **D. Gender and Infrastructure**

Compared to neighboring countries such as the PRC, Thailand, and Viet Nam, Lao PDR's road networks, electricity grid and other basic infrastructure are still relatively undeveloped especially in rural areas. The NGPES notes the importance of basic infrastructure for economic development and regional integration, and the particular benefits of rural roads and rural electrification for poverty reduction. However, infrastructure development, especially in remote and ethnic minority areas, also introduces environmental and social risks that need to be identified, minimized and mitigated. The impacts of infrastructure projects—both positive and negative—also

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<sup>72</sup> ILO. 1998. *ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*.

can affect women and men differently. These gender-differentiated effects are recognized in both the NGPES and NRDS gender strategies.

The following subheadings highlight gender issues in transport, energy, and urban development. The discussion draws heavily on the NRDS gender strategy. One theme running through these subheadings is the interconnection between environmental impacts of large infrastructure projects and their social (including gender) impacts. This reflects the importance of natural resources, including forest and water resources, to the livelihood activities of rural women in Lao PDR, especially ethnic minority women.

## **1. Transport**

The Government has made substantial investments in recent years to rebuild and expand Lao PDR's road networks. However, the NGPES noted that almost 50% of the national road network is still unpaved, and large segments of the road network are still impassible during the rainy season.

The improvement of road networks presents a number of opportunities for women and men including wider access to markets for both locally produced and imported goods; improved access to schools, health facilities, extension, and other basic services; new income-generating activities related to ecotourism and cultural tourism; and more opportunities for work in nearby towns. At the same time, the improvement of roads in rural areas inevitably attracts in-migration that can lead to land shortages, pressure on resources, and conflicts between the original inhabitants and recent settlers along the improved road corridors. The upgrading of roads through remote rural areas can also facilitate illegal logging, hunting of wildlife and overharvesting of NTFPs which damages the fragile ecosystem on which many rural households depend. The improvement of rural road networks also opens up remote areas to road construction workers, truckers, traders, and tourists which increases the risk of transmitting HIV/AIDS and other STDs to unaware and vulnerable groups, especially ethnic minorities.<sup>73</sup> Improved road links with neighboring countries also increase opportunities for trafficking in human beings, wildlife, illegal drugs, and other contraband.

The NGPES stresses the potential contribution of improved transport systems to poverty reduction. Therefore, it identifies road transport as a key sector for poverty reduction. The poverty-focused transport goals include attention to environmental and social safeguards in road construction; involvement of local communities in road planning, construction, and maintenance including local employment; and coordination with other agencies to link road construction with the extension of basic services to rural areas and HIV/AIDS awareness along road corridors. The gender strategy in the NGPES also provides for attention to gender issues in social assessments of new road projects and monitoring of project impacts, for inclusion of women in community

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<sup>73</sup> For example, UNDP has documented increases in HIV cases along highways linking Myanmar with Yunnan Province of PRC and linking Yunnan and Guangxi provinces of PRC following construction of those highways. Hsu, Lee-Nah. 2001. *Building an Alliance with Transport Sector in HIV Vulnerability Reduction* (UNDP-SEAHIV Publication). Bangkok.

consultations on new road construction, and for women's involvement in community road maintenance funds.

The NRDS includes similar measures to address gender and other social concerns in regional transport projects. These include:

- estimating gender-related benefits and impacts in the social assessments of new transport projects;
- consulting with both men's and women's groups on the design of new transport projects;
- ensuring gender equity and equal wages in local employment related to road construction and maintenance;
- including women representatives in community road maintenance funds;
- coordinating with the Ministry of Communication, Transport, Post and Construction (MCTPC), the Ministry of Health, LWU, construction companies, trucking associations, and others on STD and HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns in relevant languages at road construction camps, in communities along road corridors, and at transit stops and border crossings;
- considering the needs of small-scale traders who are predominantly women in the design of market and storage facilities near transport "hubs," at border crossings, and in duty-free zones.

These gender-aware measures build on steps that the Government is already taking at the national policy level and through specific transport projects. For example, the Government's Environment and Social Program recognizes that remote ethnic minority groups can be significantly affected by road projects and yet are ill prepared to cope with the adjustments and risks that accompany these projects. The program therefore provides for strengthening national policies and regulatory frameworks for environmental management and social safeguards related to major road projects and for improving the implementation and enforcement of these policies and frameworks.<sup>74</sup>

In individual transport projects, the Government is also paying increased attention to gender and other social impacts. For example, in the Northern Economic Corridor Project, an analysis of the potentially negative social impacts of the project, especially on ethnic minority groups in the area, led to the development of a social action plan as well as a resettlement plan. The plan includes several community-based activities and emphasizes the needs of ethnic minority women and girls.<sup>75</sup> MCTPC is also collaborating with National Committee for Control of AIDS (NCCA) to mainstream HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention in other infrastructure projects in Lao PDR. For example, in a workshop organized by MCTPC and NCCA, it was suggested that faster clearance of truckers' documents at border crossings would reduce their overnight waiting time at the border when truckers typically drink to pass the time and engage in risky sexual behavior with

<sup>74</sup> ADB. 2001. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Environment and Social Program*. Manila.

<sup>75</sup> ADB. 2002. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the GMS: Northern Economic Corridor Project*. Manila.



local women. Another suggestion from the workshop was to establish rest areas for truck operators away from hotels and guesthouses.<sup>76</sup>

## 2. Energy

Lao PDR has one of the lowest electrification rates in Asia, and the country's main power grid only reaches a small percentage of villages in remote areas. According to the LECS 3, almost all villages in urban areas have electricity, but only 13% of villages without road access have an electricity source. Although they are not connected to the main grid, remote villages may still have access to limited supplies of electricity through alternative, "off-grid" sources, including mini-hydropower facilities, small diesel generators, dry-cell batteries, kerosene or diesel lamps, and candles. Solar panels are also being introduced in some locations. Most rural households rely primarily on fuelwood for cooking.

Limited and expensive energy sources in remote villages restrict business activities and limit employment opportunities for women as well as men. Limited energy supplies also restrict the functioning of government offices and the provision of health care and other basic services in remote towns and villages. For rural households, limited and expensive energy supplies restrict the use of energy-saving appliances such as rice mills and the time children can spend on homework at night. These restrictions negatively affect women in rural areas who are primarily responsible for their families' food security and health care. In addition, in most rural communities women and girls are primarily responsible for gathering fuelwood for cooking. As logging and increased use of land for agriculture reduce forest areas, women and girls may have to travel farther to collect fuel. These burdens fall heaviest on poor women, especially female heads of households who already work long hours to meet their families' food and other needs.<sup>77</sup>

The Government plans to extend electricity to rural areas by extending the electricity grid to more accessible areas and providing "off-grid" energy sources in remote areas. The NGPES notes that extending the national grid will increase economic opportunities for people in rural areas and will provide particular benefits to rural women. However, the extent to which poor households will benefit from the grid extension depends on the pricing of services, including connection charges. It will never be economically feasible to extend the national grid to many remote villages, and therefore many rural households will continue to rely on "off-grid" energy sources. In addition, the results of a recent survey by LWU/GRID suggest that even in villages with access to electricity,

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<sup>76</sup> Rodolph, Michelle. 2001. *HIV Policy Formulation and Strategic Planning for the Communication, Transportation, Post, Construction and Tourism Sectors of Lao PDR* (UNDP-SEAHIV Publication). Bangkok.

<sup>77</sup> In contrast, a recent survey conducted by LWU/GRID in four provinces, including Xayabury and Xiengkhouang, found that where women are earning substantial income for their families from weaving, embroidery, and other activities, they and their families recognize that their time is not productively spent in gathering fuelwood, and male family members tend to provide more help with this and other household chores. For example, some families use carts or rented vehicles to transport larger quantities of wood at one time. LWU/GRID. 2001. *Fuel for Life: Women, Men and the Fuelwood Cycle in the Lao PDR*. Vientiane.

women may prefer to use fuelwood for cooking because of the flavor it imparts to the food.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, initiatives to promote cultivation and conservation of fuelwood will continue to be relevant, especially for poor women in rural areas.

Any energy project in rural areas also entails environmental and social risks similar to those discussed earlier in connection with transport projects and which need to be identified and addressed. Hydropower projects introduce particularly large and complex risks due to their scale, the location of the projects in remote areas with fragile ecosystems and ethnic minority settlements, and their various “upstream” and “downstream” impacts. These projects can have a variety of gender impacts including the disruption of women’s farming, foraging, and fishing in the catchment and reservoir areas and possible negative effects on water quality, river gardens, fish stocks, and other conditions downstream. The influx of large construction crews into a remote area also introduces the risk of STD transmission to local communities and particularly to young women and girls.

As in the transport sector, the Government is taking steps at the national policy level to maximize the poverty-reduction benefits of expanding energy supplies and to address related environmental and social risks. It recently abolished the 30% cost-sharing requirement for villages to connect to the electricity grid, recognizing that this policy disproportionately burdened poor and remote villages and generally deterred them from connecting to the grid. At the same time, the Government’s Environment and Social Program aims to strengthen the regulatory framework for environmental management and social safeguards in large energy projects including hydropower projects and expansions of the electricity grid.

The NRDS includes several measures to support pro-poor, gender-sensitive development of energy sources through several measures. These include:

- consulting with both men’s and women’s groups on the design of new energy projects;
- considering the energy needs of poor households and small businesses in the social assessments of new energy projects;
- adjusting connection charges and electricity rates to encourage poor households to connect to the electricity grid;
- supporting alternative energy sources in “off-grid” areas, for example, by facilitating tax-free import and marketing of solar panels;
- promoting use of energy-saving appliances such as rice mills and energy-saving stoves, for example, by facilitating tax-free imports and marketing;
- supporting sustainable cultivation of fuelwood.

Similar steps are already being taken to address poverty and social issues in particular energy projects, such as the Northern Area Rural Power Distribution Project supported by ADB.<sup>79</sup> Other agencies, international NGOs, and some pioneering entrepreneurs are also promoting

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> ADB. 2003. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Northern Area Rural Power Distribution Project*. Manila.

alternative and sustainable energy sources in rural areas. In addition, the sponsors of the proposed Nam Theun 2 hydropower project have carried out a wide range of social and environmental impact studies and are developing plans to deal with the expected impacts of the project on the catchment, dam and downstream areas and on the ethnic minority groups living in these areas. For the first time in a Lao PDR hydropower project, a gender impact assessment and gender strategy are also being prepared.

### **3. Urban Development**

As road networks improve throughout Lao PDR, increasing numbers of people are expected to move from rural areas to provincial and district towns in search of better work opportunities and better access to basic services. Migration to towns is also being propelled by national policies on rural land allocation and focal site development. In-migration to urban centers is already putting pressure on land, WSS, market facilities and other infrastructure. These trends highlight the need for town planning to support more sustainable urban development.

Town planning and development projects raise issues related to women's market and other economic activities and to women's strong interest in improving water quality and sanitation services for their households. These roles and interests have been recognized in a number of urban development projects in Lao PDR including the new Small Towns Development Sector Project.<sup>80</sup> For example, the gender strategy incorporated in that project provides for representation of women in village committees overseeing infrastructure improvements, for equal participation of women and men in community meetings and training, for flexibility in the financing of village improvements and WSS user charges to make the improvements and services more affordable for poor households, and for support for market vendors and microenterprises through linkages with microfinance programs. Women's participation can also be beneficial in the design and construction of improvements to markets, bus stations and other town infrastructure since women vendors are significant users of these facilities.

Land use planning, land allocation, and land titling also raise a number of gender issues related to women's and men's different uses of land and to social rules and practices on land ownership and inheritance. Considerable attention was paid to gender issues in the preparation of the original Land Titling Project (LTP). As a result, the project included public information programs to explain the land titling process to landholders, including the importance of land titles for women. A recent project report suggests that these activities have been successful in raising the awareness of government staff and participating communities about women's land rights with close to 40% of land titles issued to women and about 30% in joint ownership.<sup>81</sup> Similar awareness-raising activities are included in the follow-up project, LTP II.<sup>82</sup> The gender issues in the original

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<sup>80</sup> ADB. 2002. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Small Towns Development Sector Project*. Manila.

<sup>81</sup> Lao Consulting Group, op. cit.

<sup>82</sup> LTP II also includes measures to better mainstream gender concerns in the land titling process. World Bank. 2003. *Project Appraisal Document on a Proposed Credit to Lao PDR for Second Land Titling Project*. Washington, DC.

project were fairly straightforward, since land titling took place mainly in urban and peri-urban areas that were predominantly ethnic Lao and where social practices therefore support equal land ownership and inheritance rights for women and men. Gender awareness raising of government staff and participating communities will be even more important in the follow-up project which will extend land titling to lowland areas where there is more ethnic diversity and where women in many ethnic groups have more limited traditional land rights.<sup>83</sup>

The NRDS recommends similar measures to promote more gender-aware town planning and development. These include:

- improving the gender and ethnic balance in municipal government offices and in provincial and district land offices;
- working with provincial and district LWU representatives to promote awareness of land issues especially among ethnic minority women in urban and peri-urban areas;
- requiring gender and social analysis and consultations with women's groups in town planning exercises;
- involving women in the planning and supervision of urban infrastructure projects especially improvements in urban WSS facilities and market facilities through town/village committees and user groups.

#### **4. International Commitments Related to Gender and Infrastructure**

Gender-aware approaches to infrastructure development, including recognition of the negative effects of environmental damage on poor women, also further Lao PDR's international commitments to gender equality. For example, Article 14(h) of CEDAW requires Lao PDR and other state parties to ensure that rural women, "...enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications."

The Beijing Platform for Action, which Lao PDR and other countries affirmed in 1995, includes several detailed references to women, infrastructure, and the environment. In the area of women and the economy, governments committed to take women's priorities into account in public investment programs for water and sanitation, electrification, road construction and transport and to provide public infrastructure to ensure equal market access for female and male entrepreneurs. In the area of women and the environment, governments made a number of additional commitments, including (i) to integrate a gender perspective in rural and urban infrastructure development; (ii) to involve local communities (particularly women) in the identification of public service needs and the design of urban infrastructure; (iii) to evaluate the environmental impact of policies and programs, including women's use of natural resources and women's susceptibility to environmental degradation and hazards; (iv) to protect the local knowledge and practices of indigenous women related to the natural environment; and (v) to support women's access to sustainable and affordable energy technologies from renewable sources.

<sup>83</sup> For example, awareness-raising activities could point out that the Constitution, Land Law, and Property Law support the joint ownership of land acquired by a husband and wife during marriage and that this is becoming the common practice in urban and peri-urban areas, regardless of ethnicity.

## **E. Gender and Governance**

### **1. National Trends**

Lao PDR's transition from a centrally-planned to a more market-based system has led to a number of changes in its governance structure such as the introduction of laws governing property, contracts, foreign investment, banking, business, taxation, and bankruptcy. The 1991 Constitution provides for individual and private sector ownership as well as state and collective ownership of property and for individual rights of citizens. The Constitution also provides for three branches of government—executive, legislative and judiciary—under the guidance of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. The roles of mass organizations such as LWU and local administrations (including provinces, municipalities, districts, and villages) are also delineated.

The responsibilities of central and local government levels have been adjusted over the years. Under an instruction issued in 2000, a number of responsibilities have been devolved to local levels. In this scheme, provinces are to function as the “strategic units,” with districts as the “planning units,” and villages as the basic “implementing units” for development.<sup>84</sup> However, more remote provinces and most rural districts are severely strained in carrying out these duties because of their limited revenue sources and lack of staff capacity. There is also a general question about the capacity of villages to “implement” development policies and programs, especially in rural areas.

Government offices at all levels have difficulty retaining qualified staff because the value of civil servants' salaries was severely eroded by inflation and devaluation of the Lao kip during the Asian financial crisis. This trend is expected to worsen as the private sector expands and the gap between public and private sector wages increases. Schools, health centers and government offices in rural districts have particular difficulty in attracting and retaining capable staff due to the perceived hardships of the posts and to limited promotion possibilities.

A recent policy document on governance that is highlighted in the NGPES outlines the Government's plans to improve the systems of governance in order to better support the national plans for development and poverty reduction. The four areas of reform include (i) public service improvements; (ii) people's participation (through the National Assembly and central-local relations); (iii) rule of law and access to justice; and (iv) financial management (also including land administration).<sup>85</sup> More specifically, the governance reform agenda includes changes in civil service regulations to create a more transparent, merit-based system and to improve salaries and benefits; to expand training programs for government staff; to revise the instruction on decentralization to clarify roles of the various government levels; to harmonize domestic laws with Lao PDR's international commitments; to create provincial courts and strengthen village mediation

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<sup>84</sup> State Planning Committee. 2000. *Recommendations on the Establishment of Province as a Strategic Unit, District as a Planning Unit and Village as a Basic Implementing Unit (No. 128/SPC)*. Vientiane.

<sup>85</sup> Lao PDR. 2003. *Public Service Reform, People's Participation, Rule of Law and Sound Financial Management: A Policy Paper of the Government of Lao PDR on Governance Issues* (Governance Policy Paper). Vientiane.

committees; and to establish legal aid programs through the provincial and district offices of the Ministry of Justice (as well as the bar association). Gender-related reforms in the governance policy document are noted below.

## 2. Gender Issues in Governance

The proportion of women in the National Assembly increased substantially in the late 1990s from below 10% to over 20% and now stands at close to 23%. As noted in Chapter II, this proportion compares well with neighboring countries such as the PRC and Viet Nam and surpasses that of many industrialized countries.<sup>86</sup> A women's caucus was formed in National Assembly in late 2002, and a gender mainstreaming strategy and an action plan for the National Assembly are being developed. Among other issues, this strategy and action plan are expected to deal with the "gender segregation" in National Assembly posts. At present, men occupy most of the positions on committees dealing with economic, legal, and security issues while women sit on committees addressing social and cultural issues.<sup>87</sup>

In other respects, Lao women are not well represented in government offices and decision-making bodies. Out of about 90,000 civil servants in Lao PDR, only about 34,000 are women, and very few women hold senior positions in national, provincial, and district offices or in the judiciary.<sup>88</sup> This is due in part to retrenchments in the civil service beginning in the late 1980s that resulted in disproportionate layoffs of women. Ethnic minority women are particularly under-represented in the civil service. Women also hold few decision-making positions at the village level. In 2000, women represented 1.2% of village chiefs, and 1.6% of deputy village chiefs.<sup>89</sup> A survey of four provinces also found that less than 10% of village committee members were women, although there was a slightly higher percentage of women on control and mediation committees.<sup>90</sup>

## 3. Gender and Governance Initiatives

As discussed further in Chapter IV.D, the Government recently established a National Commission for the Advancement of Women (NCAW) to promote gender equality and women's advancement in Lao PDR. This high-level interministerial body is chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is concurrently Deputy Prime Minister. Its responsibilities include developing a national policy and strategic action plan for women's advancement and guidelines to integrate

<sup>86</sup> In addition to gender ratios in school enrollment and literacy and the share of women in wage employment, the indicators for achievement of MDG 3 include the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament. The Government has set national targets for gender parity in school enrollment and literacy (see Chapter III.B.1) and is considering 2015 targets for the wage employment and national parliament indicators as well.

<sup>87</sup> MDG Progress Report, op.cit.

<sup>88</sup> Governance Policy Paper, op. cit.; CEDAW Report, op. cit.

<sup>89</sup> National HDR 2001, op. cit.

<sup>90</sup> LWU/GRID. 1998. *Women's Participation in Decision Making at the Village Level*. Vientiane.

gender considerations in all areas of work at central and local levels.<sup>91</sup> With support from ADB, the LWU recently developed guidelines for a national gender action plan that were submitted to the Prime Minister's office in 2003.<sup>92</sup> It is expected that the final version of the guidelines will be used by the NCAW to develop the national policy and action plan for women's advancement.

The Government's new policy paper on governance also includes a number of gender-related reforms. These include the following:

- developing a gender mainstreaming strategy to increase women's participation in national and local governance and local development planning;
- raising awareness of government officials on gender considerations in local planning and budgeting;
- collecting data disaggregated by sex at the local level;
- Ensuring women's representation on the provincial and district "economic advisory councils" to be established under the new Law on Local Administration;
- strengthening the office responsible for providing legal advice to women;
- collecting data on women offenders;
- enhancing implementation of measures to ensure respect for women's and children's rights.<sup>93</sup>

Similarly, the NGPES supports increases in the representation of women in provincial and district government offices and in village committees especially those related to public health and agricultural extension activities. Recent reports on the land allocation and land titling processes have also recommended greater participation of women in village committees responsible for land use and land allocation decisions. These recommendations note that often the only woman included in a local decision-making body is the LWU representative and that broader representation of women's interests is needed to achieve development goals at the local level.

The NRDS gender strategy includes similar recommendations to improve the responsiveness of provincial and district governments to the needs of women and ethnic minority communities. These include:

- improving the gender and ethnic balance in provincial and district offices especially among field workers in health, agriculture, and land allocation;
- encouraging village leaders to involve more women in village committees and user groups;
- consulting with women's groups in participatory planning exercises in villages and village clusters;

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<sup>91</sup> Lao PDR. 2003. *Decree on the Establishment and Functioning of the National Commission for the Advancement of Women*. Decree No. 37/PM (1 April 2003).

<sup>92</sup> ADB. 2001. Technical Assistance to Lao PDR for *Capacity Building of the Lao Women's Union*. Manila.

<sup>93</sup> Governance Policy Paper, op. cit.

- providing training in gender-sensitive planning and budgeting to provincial and district planning offices;
- expanding opportunities for poor and ethnic minority youth to work in community development and the private sector (for example, through apprenticeship programs).

The Planning Support Programme of the Committee for Planning and Cooperation that is being implemented at the provincial, district, and village levels provides an opportunity to better integrate gender and ethnic minority concerns in local planning and governance. Among other things, the program promotes women's participation in participatory planning at the village level.<sup>94</sup> In parallel, the National Poverty Reduction Fund that provides block grants to poor communities to implement small-scale infrastructure projects includes mechanisms to ensure that poor villagers and women participate in village decision making and benefit from project activities.<sup>95</sup> These programs also have the potential to strengthen the capacity of provincial and district planning officials to mainstream gender considerations in their planning and budgeting exercises.<sup>96</sup>

#### 4. International Commitments on Gender and Governance

The establishment of the NCAW and other efforts to mainstream gender concerns in central and local government work further Lao PDR's international commitments related to gender, governance, and women's rights. For example, Article 2 of CEDAW requires Lao PDR and other state parties to eliminate discrimination against women through various means including changes in discriminatory laws, regulations, customs and practices and the introduction of new laws and mechanisms to protect women from discrimination. Article 7 of CEDAW commits state parties to ensure women's equal rights to stand for election and to vote, to hold public office and to participate in public decision making, and to participate in NGOs and associations concerned with public and political affairs. Article 15 requires state parties to accord women equality with men before the law including equal capacity to enter into contracts and other legal instruments, to administer property, and to appear in courts and other tribunals.

The Beijing Platform for Action affirmed by Lao PDR and other countries in 1995 addresses gender and governance through three of its twelve areas of concern: (1) women in power and decision making; (2) institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; and (3) human rights of women. Its strategic objectives in these areas include (i) ensuring women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making; (ii) increasing women's capacity to participate in public decision making and leadership; (iii) creating and strengthening governmental bodies for the advancement of women; (iv) integrating gender perspectives in legislation, public

<sup>94</sup> CPC. 2002. *Guidelines for Local Development Planning: Village/Kum Ban, District and Provincial Level*. Vientiane; CPC and UNDP. 2003. *Planning Support Programme* (Programme Document). Vientiane.

<sup>95</sup> World Bank. 2002. *Project Appraisal Document on a Proposed Credit to Lao PDR for a Poverty Reduction Fund Project*. Washington, DC.

<sup>96</sup> Over the last several years, a number of user-friendly tools for gender-sensitive planning and budgeting have been developed and tested in a number of developing countries. UNIFEM. 2002. *Gender Budget Initiatives: Strategies, Concepts and Experiences*. New York.



policies, programs and projects; (v) generating and disseminating data disaggregated by gender for planning and evaluation; (vi) promoting and protecting women's human rights through implementation of CEDAW and other human rights instruments; (vii) ensuring equality and non-discrimination in law and practice; and (viii) promoting legal literacy (e.g., by raising awareness about national laws and mechanisms to protect women's rights, by including human rights education in school curricula, and by enacting special measures to provide this information to indigenous, migrant, and displaced women and women with disabilities).

## **F. Gender and Regional Cooperation**

Since introducing the New Economic Mechanism in 1986, the Government has been expanding trade, transport, and other links with neighboring countries in the GMS. Through regional cooperation, the Government aims to turn Lao PDR's "landlocked" status to advantage as a "landlink" between the more dynamic economies in the region. This expansion of cross-border transport networks and trade would also restore the country's historical position as a crossroads for the movement of people and goods. Lao PDR's growing interest in regional cooperation can be seen in its involvement in the GMS; the Mekong River Commission; the Ayeyawaddy-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) with Cambodia, Myanmar, and Thailand; the "Growth Triangle" and "Emerald Triangle" initiatives with Cambodia and Viet Nam; and subregional initiatives on HIV/AIDS, migration, human trafficking, and other emerging issues. In 1997, Lao PDR also became a member of ASEAN signaling its interest in expanding trade and other ties with other Asian countries. These trends toward regional integration are further supported in the NGPES and the NRDS.

Greater economic links with neighboring countries present a number of opportunities for Lao women and men. Improved road systems can increase access to cross-border markets for locally produced goods including agricultural products, NTFPs, and handicrafts. Likewise, increased cross-border trade can make a greater variety of goods available to Lao consumers. Improved transport links and more open borders facilitate migration for better work opportunities. Regional cooperation can also support service businesses such as ecotourism that have the potential to increase livelihoods while promoting environmental conservation in ecologically rich but fragile areas.

Increased regional transport and trade also pose risks especially to remote communities. The availability of cheap imports in local markets may undermine local production of competing goods. Expanded road networks can improve remote villages' access to schools, health centers, and markets, but the influx of truckers, traders and tourists into remote areas also increases the transmission risk of HIV/AIDS and other STDs. Improved regional transport links may also encourage overharvesting of certain NTFPs for cross-border sale and can facilitate illegal trafficking in people, wildlife, and drugs.

The following discussion highlights gender-related issues in cross-border trade, tourism, and migration and some recent initiatives to maximize the benefits and minimize the risks

associated with these activities. The risks of HIV/AIDS transmission associated with improved cross-border road links and increased migration are discussed in Chapter III.B.2.

## 1. Trade

Lao PDR's trading activity has increased substantially over the past decade. Exports rose from \$64 million in 1990 to \$443 million in 2002 while imports rose during the same period from \$149 million to \$763 million.<sup>97</sup> Lao PDR's main exports are electricity, garments and wood products. Its main exporting partners are Viet Nam and Thailand followed by several European countries and Japan. It imports mainly from PRC, Thailand, and Viet Nam.

As a member of ASEAN, Lao PDR has committed to reduce import tariffs and to take other steps under the framework agreement for the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA). The country is also included in ASEAN framework agreements to liberalize trade with PRC, India, and Japan. Lao PDR has a trade and cooperation agreement with the EU and a more specific agreement on textiles and clothing that accounts for the large increase in textile and clothing exports to the EU in recent years. Lao PDR signed a trade agreement with the United States in late 2003 that is still to be ratified and has applied for membership in the WTO. The NGPES confirms the Government's commitment to liberalize trade, not only in goods, but also in services and investment. The NGPES also outlines a number of proposed changes in the regulation of imports, exports, and domestic trade and trade-related capacity building programs supported by the WTO, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and others.

The liberalization of trade presents both opportunities and risks for Lao producers, workers, and consumers. Changing trade patterns and policies can also affect women and men differently due to their different livelihood and employment activities, their access to resources (such as extension services and credit), and their household responsibilities. For example, the promotion of cash crops for export by small farmers is likely to involve the entire farming household. However, women are still likely to engage in subsistence farming, gardening and foraging to ensure food security for their families. The promotion of cash crops for export may therefore increase the work burden for women farmers. Expanded trade in NTFPs can increase incomes for the families that harvest and sell them, but the rapid depletion of NTFPs in rural areas also can deprive poor households of alternative food sources and natural medicines. As a result, poor women may have to travel farther to collect NTFPs to meet their families' food and health needs. Timesaving improvements such as rice mills and clean water sources near villages and sustainable cultivation of fuelwood and NTFPs can mitigate these negative effects.

The recent mushrooming of garment factories in Lao PDR has opened up new job opportunities for young Lao women from mainly rural areas. However, as discussed in Chapter III.C.3, these jobs pay very low wages which can encourage young women to switch to "better paying" work in beer shops or nightclubs or to seek better jobs in Thailand. There are also reports of harsh, even abusive working conditions in some factories. In addition, the future of the Lao

<sup>97</sup> ADB. 2004. *Key Indicators of Developing Asian and Pacific Countries*. Manila.

garment industry is also extremely uncertain due to the expected increase in competition from the PRC, India and other garment-exporting countries as the trade in garments is liberalized under the WTO Agreement on Textiles and Clothing.

Among women, the effect of trade patterns and policies can also vary depending on ethnicity, political connections, and other factors. For example, Lao women and women from other lowland groups have long been active in small-scale trading including cross-border trading.<sup>98</sup> At least since the 1960s, some of these women have also been active in large-scale, long-distance trading of manufactured goods and processed foods throughout the northern provinces and with neighboring towns in southern PRC and northern Thailand.<sup>99</sup> In the late 1970s, the Government severely restricted private trading, both domestic and cross-border. This policy change negatively affected small-scale traders, mainly women. However, even in this restrictive environment, a few women traders continued or expanded their long-distance trading activities along the upper Mekong. Some of these entrepreneurs had close ties with local officials or state trading companies which may account for part of their success. Since the Government loosened restrictions on cross-border trade starting in the late 1980s, more women traders have entered the market. Married women appear to have an advantage in establishing business relationships and in obtaining credit from Thai suppliers in part because they are perceived as more stable, reliable credit risks.<sup>100</sup>

The expansion of cross-border trade is also opening up new markets for hand-woven textiles and other handicrafts that are produced mainly by women.<sup>101</sup> Women from several ethnic groups are increasingly involved in commercial weaving and embroidery activities, and have established relationships with buyers in Thailand and overseas markets.<sup>102</sup> However, the economic benefit for handicraft producers depends on their knowledge of the market, their access to inputs, their relationship with traders, and other factors. For example, a recent study in Xayabury compared the experience of women in traditional cotton weaving villages with women who have more recently taken up weaving through an income-generation project. Lue women have traditionally woven cotton for domestic use as well as for sale. Beginning in the 1980s, some relatives in Thailand contracted Lao Lue women to weave cotton fabric based on popular patterns in the Thai market. Eventually some of the Lao Lue weavers began weaving independently and selling their fabrics in the Thai border market. After trading restrictions between Lao PDR and Thailand were lifted, the Thai demand for Lao cotton textiles increased and women from other ethnic groups in Xayabury began weaving for the Thai market. However, the Lue women who have more experience in cotton weaving and better connections with the Thai market generally obtain better prices for their weaving than newer weavers. Some Lue women have also become merchants, acting as intermediaries between the new weaving villages and Thai buyers.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> The Lue are a lowland ethnic minority within the Lao-Tai ethnolinguistic family.

<sup>99</sup> Andrew Walker. 2002 (reprint). "Women, Space and History: Long-Distance Trading in Northwestern Laos," in *Laos: Culture and Society*, edited by Grant Evans. Chiang Mai.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> However, the influx of cheap, factory-made goods can also undermine the production of handmade clothing and handicrafts. Alton and Rattavong, op. cit.

<sup>102</sup> Ireson-Doolittle and Moreno-Black, op. cit.; Kusakabe, op. cit.

<sup>103</sup> Kusakabe, op.cit.

The study of cotton textile trade in Xayabury also illustrates the different impact that trade rules can have on differently sized businesses. An export tax was introduced in 2000 that could be paid either by the piece or on a monthly basis in advance. (The per-piece tax rate was higher than the rate under the monthly payment scheme.) The Lue weaver/merchants had the accumulated capital to pay the export tax in advance while newer individual weavers did not.<sup>104</sup>

The Xayabury study also highlights the shifts in the gender division of labor that can result from changes in trading patterns. The study found that in villages where commercial weaving has recently been introduced many women have been exempted from upland farming and collecting forest products so that they can concentrate on weaving which is perceived as a source of steady cash income for households. Ironically in older weaving villages, women's weaving is still considered to be a "leisure time" activity. Thus, more experienced women have not been relieved of their other household duties although their weaving actually contributes much more to household income than in newer weaving villages.<sup>105</sup>

It is not always easy to predict the gender and other social impact of changes in trade policies and rules particularly between urban and rural areas and across ethnic groups. Because trading patterns and rules are changing rapidly in Lao PDR, it is important to monitor these trends and to take appropriate and timely steps to minimize any negative effects.<sup>106</sup> The NRDS gender strategy includes several recommendations along these lines. They include:

- supporting rural women's livelihood activities including community-based agroprocessing, cultivation and sustainable harvesting of NTFPs, and market gardens;
- improving market information systems for handicraft producers, agroprocessors and other small businesses using radio, Internet, and other technologies;
- analyzing the impact of trade rules and taxes (including proposed changes in these rules) on micro and small businesses;
- providing market and storage facilities for small-scale traders at border crossings and in duty-free zones.

The precarious situation of young women working in the garment sector also points to the need for more careful monitoring of their working conditions and effective enforcement of the

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Another study of Lao textile businesses found similarly mixed impacts on the division of household responsibilities. Ireson-Doolittle and Moreno-Black, op. cit.

<sup>106</sup> This discussion has only highlighted a few of the gender-related impacts of increased trade. Gender issues also arise in relation to trade in services, trade-related changes in intellectual property regimes and other government regulations, and impacts of tariff reductions on government revenue and budgets. UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Gender and Trade. 2004. *Trade and Gender: Opportunities and Challenges for Developing Countries* (edited by Anh-Nga Tran-Nguyen and Americo Beviglia Zampetti). New York and Geneva.

Labour Law. It would also be prudent to develop retraining and other programs for garment workers who may be laid off in the event of factory closings or downsizing.<sup>107</sup>

## **2. Tourism**

Tourism is one of Lao PDR's fastest-growing sectors. International arrivals have increased dramatically from 14,400 in 1990 to an estimated 735,600 in 2002. Tourism now contributes substantially to national income (representing 7–9% of gross domestic product) and generates employment. Increasing numbers of tourists are also exploring more remote areas of the country in addition to the main destinations of Vientiane and Luang Prabang.<sup>108</sup>

There is strong interest in developing Lao PDR's tourism potential especially for ecotourism and cultural tourism. This interest is reflected in Lao PDR's tourism strategy that is also highlighted in the NGPES and NRDS. The tourism strategy promotes community-based tourism, meaningful participation of women and ethnic minorities in the sector, and measures to address the social and environmental risks associated with tourism development. Lao PDR also recently hosted the ASEAN Tourism Forum and is participating in both the GMS working group on tourism and the "Green Triangle" tourism initiative with Cambodia and Viet Nam.

Tourism holds out a number of opportunities for women as well as men. These include increasing demand from tourism facilities for locally grown agricultural products and handicrafts produced mainly by women and new job opportunities as tour guides and travel agency employees, as hotel and restaurant staff, and in shops, Internet cafes and various supply, maintenance, and service businesses.

However, women and ethnic minorities may not benefit equitably from increased tourism. For example, hotels and restaurants could contract with village leaders for the supply of locally grown produce, although the produce is grown primarily by women in the village. Hotels, guesthouses, and shops might also purchase locally made handicrafts through traders who pay low prices to the women who make them and then sell the crafts at a substantial profit. Tour operators, hotels, and restaurants could also show gender or ethnic bias in their hiring practices and in-house training programs and as a result, women and ethnic minorities could be hired primarily for less-skilled, lower-paying jobs. It is therefore important for vocational or technical education programs related to the tourism sector to include targets or other measures to ensure gender balance and ethnic diversity in enrollment. The National Tourism Authority and provincial tourism offices could also encourage private tour, hotel and restaurant operators to set their own gender balance and ethnic diversity goals. In addition, private sector tour and hotel operators could offer

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<sup>107</sup> Cambodia and Bangladesh are considering similar options under studies supported by ADB. ADB. 2003. Technical Assistance to the Kingdom of Cambodia for *Preventing Poverty and Empowering Female Garment Workers Affected by the International Trade Environment*. Manila; ADB. 2004. Technical Assistance to the People's Republic of Bangladesh: *Social Projection of Poor Female Workers in the Garment Sector in the Context of Changing Trade Environments*. Manila.

<sup>108</sup> NGPES, op. cit.; CPC, Eight Northern Provinces and Special Region, and ADB. 2004. *Northern Region Development Strategy, Volume V (Trade and Tourism Strategy)*. Vientiane.

apprenticeships to young women and men from rural areas, to help them gain the skills and work experience needed to hold responsible jobs in the tourism sector.

The national tourism strategy recognizes the social risks that can accompany tourism development especially for young women from ethnic minority groups. The influx of tourists to remote areas and the migration of young people from rural areas to cities and towns to work in tourism-related businesses will increase the transmission risk of STDs and HIV/AIDS. The STD and HIV/AIDS risk is especially high for young women working in hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, and nightclubs who may be drawn into part-time or full-time sex work. For example, a recent study commissioned by UNDP found that the “service women” working in several northern provinces were predominantly from ethnic minority backgrounds and had higher than average education levels but had very little awareness of HIV/AIDS and virtually no leverage to require customers to use condoms.<sup>109</sup> The study also noted the risk that with further traffic through northern Lao PDR facilitated by improved road networks, the “hospitality” industry could follow some of the negative trends in neighboring Thailand. These trends include an increase in the number of hotel brothels and massage parlors; a related increase in the “demand” for sex workers, particularly from ethnic minority groups; and the sale and trafficking of women and girls to other provinces and countries through increasingly organized networks. (Human trafficking risks are discussed further under the next subheading.) The National Tourism Authority has already started raising awareness of these social risks among its staff and in the tourism industry through workshops and other activities.

Ecotourism and “village” tourism present special social as well as environmental risks that also need to be addressed. A recent status report on ecotourism in Lao PDR found that most tour packages being marketed as “ecotourism” actually provide no conservation benefits to the country and few financial or other benefits to local communities. However, the report found that the Nam Ha Ecotourism Project in Luang Namtha has been successful in supporting biodiversity, in providing direct benefits to participating communities, and in avoiding exploitation or capturing of benefits by a few.<sup>110</sup>

Increasingly, it is recognized that successful community-based tourism depends on the involvement of village women and on sensitivity to gender issues. For example, a team developing village treks near Savannakhet found that they needed female guides and female interpreters in order to develop a better relationship with the village women. As a result, they engaged the Savannakhet GRID Centre affiliated with the LWU to provide gender sensitivity training to government staff involved in the project and added two women to the project team. However, the project team still encountered difficulties in working with women in ethnic minority villages because very few speak Lao.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Chamberlain, James R. 2000. *HIV Vulnerability and Population Mobility in the Northern Provinces of the Lao PDR* (UNDP-SEAHIV Publication). Bangkok.

<sup>110</sup> Stoer, Pieter. 2002. *Ecotourism Status Report for Lao PDR* (Reference Document for National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan supported by UNDP and SUNV). Vientiane.

<sup>111</sup> SNV. 2003. *Sustainable Tourism Development in Nepal, Vietnam and Lao PDR: Experiences of SNV and Partner Organizations*.

The new Mekong Tourism Development Project supported by ADB builds on the successful Nam Ha model. The project also pays explicit attention to gender issues through gender balance in training and membership in ecotourism associations, in support of village-based women's groups, and in community awareness programs on STD/HIV/AIDS risks.<sup>112</sup>

The NRDS gender strategy includes similar measures to maximize benefits and minimize risks of tourism development in remote areas especially for women and ethnic minorities. These include:

- improving the gender and ethnic balance in provincial tourism offices and encouraging hotels, restaurants, travel agencies and tour operators to set their own gender equity and ethnic diversity goals for hiring, in-house training, and promotions;
- ensuring gender and ethnic balance in vocational and technical training programs linked to the tourism industry;
- providing periodic awareness programs on STD/HIV/AIDS and trafficking risks for provincial and district tourism staff;
- establishing guidelines for tour operators and owners of hotels, guesthouses, and restaurants to educate and protect their employees from these risks;
- establishing common standards and guidelines for responsible, gender-sensitive ecotourism and village tourism (based on the Nam Ha model).

### **3. Migration and Human Trafficking**

Movements of people due to economic opportunities, local conflicts, war, relocation policies, poverty, and disease have a long history in the Mekong region. These waves of migration explain the diversity of ethnic groups in Lao PDR and the settlements of the same or similar groups in neighboring countries. War and other conflicts in the 1960s and 1970s caused large movements of people from Laos to Thailand and other countries and major relocations of people within the country. Following the establishment of Lao PDR, national and provincial border controls restricted migration to a great extent. The relaxing of these controls in the 1990s has led to large increases in both internal and cross-border migration, mainly for work.

The Asian Migrant Centre recently estimated that there are at least 1.6 to 2 million migrants in the Mekong region and that most are undocumented.<sup>113</sup> Estimates of the number of Lao migrants in other Mekong countries vary widely. Over 42,000 Lao migrants were registered in Thailand in 2002.<sup>114</sup> In contrast, in 2000 the number of undocumented Lao workers in Thailand

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<sup>112</sup> ADB. 2002. *RRP on Proposed Loans to the Kingdom of Cambodia, Lao PDR, and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam for the GMS: Mekong Tourism Development Project*. Manila.

<sup>113</sup> Harima, Reiko et al. 2003. "Migration," in *Social Challenges for the Mekong Region*, edited by Mingsarn Kaosa-ard and John Dore (Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai University). Bangkok: White Lotus.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

was estimated to be at least 95,000.<sup>115</sup> The current figure is undoubtedly much higher and rising. Provincial reports for three provinces—Khammuane, Savannakhet and Champassak—counted over 45,000 irregular migrants in Thailand in 2000 from those provinces alone. Moreover, the number of reported migrants from Champassak had risen from fewer than 1,800 in 1996 to over 8,500 in 2000. This may give some indication of the likely rise in migration from other provinces.<sup>116</sup>

Recent reports and surveys provide a profile of Lao migrants in Thailand. For example, 10,000 Lao migrants were reportedly repatriated from Thailand in 2000. Their ages were between 14 and 24, and more than half were under 18. Sixty percent were women and girls working mainly in nightclubs, restaurants, garment factories, and as domestic servants.<sup>117</sup> Other reports indicate that the gender balance of Lao migrants may be closer to 50/50 with boys finding work in agriculture, construction, and commercial fishing. Lao migrants are generally not the poorest or least educated in their districts. Their main motivations seem to be to earn money to help their families build or renovate a house, to earn money to buy consumer goods, and to experience the “glamorous” life depicted on Thai television. Many young Lao people travel to Thailand of their own volition and even without their parents’ knowledge or approval.

Lao migrants are generally recruited through established networks that may include family members, neighbors, or former migrants from the same village or district. Recruiters charge substantial fees that may be deducted from the migrants’ wages. In the worst case, the recruiter is actually a trafficker who deceives the young Lao worker about the nature of the work that is being arranged, and sells the young worker to the owner of a sweatshop, brothel, fishing boat or other business. The young worker is then effectively imprisoned until s/he can either pay off the “debt” or escape. Even migrant workers who are treated fairly by their recruiters are paid substantially less than a Thai would be paid for the same work. Since they usually do not have work permits, Lao migrant workers are also subject to arrest and confiscation of money by Thai police and may be fined and/or imprisoned when they return to Lao PDR.<sup>118</sup>

Increasing numbers of workers are also migrating to Lao PDR from neighboring countries mainly the PRC and Viet Nam. A 2000 survey found close to 6,900 foreign workers registered in Lao PDR. In contrast, the Lao-Vietnam Cooperation Agency reported that about 15,000 Vietnamese were working in Lao PDR in 1999 including undocumented workers.<sup>119</sup> Many of these migrants work on national or provincial construction projects, but the migrants also include traders, sex workers and others. Little information is available on internal migration although the trends include the relocation of upland villages closer to roads and markets and the movement of young

<sup>115</sup> NSC and NERI 2001, op. cit.

<sup>116</sup> ILO. 2003, *Lao PDR: Preliminary Assessment of Illegal Labour Migration and Trafficking in Children and Women for Labour Exploitation*. Bangkok.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> ILO 2003, op.cit.; Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and UN Interagency Project on Human Trafficking in the GMS. 2001. *Trafficking in Women and Children in the Lao PDR: Initial Observations*. Vientiane; MLSW and UNICEF. 2004. *Broken Promises Shattered Dreams: A Profile of Child Trafficking in the Lao PDR*. Vientiane

<sup>119</sup> NSC and NERI (2001), op. cit.



women from rural areas to work in garment factories, restaurants, and bars/nightclubs in Vientiane and other urban areas.

Initial studies of migration and human trafficking in Lao PDR focused mainly on the increasing movement of young people to Thailand for work or adventure, and the exploitative and risky situations in which they found themselves. Some have also warned about the trafficking risks associated with internal development trends and policies. For example, one researcher cautions that, "...with the opening of major transportation routes, the expansion of trekking tourism and development projects, and the planned displacement and resettlement of highland populations, Laos will play an increasingly important role as a source of supply of minority girls for the Thai sex industry."<sup>120</sup> On the "demand" side, researchers have noted that the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS in Thailand has raised the value of young girls from remote areas who are perceived to be "healthy" and therefore "safe." Young girls are also more easily intimidated and controlled by agents and brothel owners, especially if they lack language skills and have entered Thailand illegally. On the "supply" side, there is concern that households in upland Lao communities may feel increasing pressure to send their young people to work in district and provincial towns and in Thailand to make up for the lost cash income from opium production and reduced rice production and to buy consumer goods that are increasingly available in local markets. There is also concern that improved road links in the northern region of Lao PDR will facilitate the trafficking of girls from Myanmar and southwestern PRC through Lao PDR to Thailand.<sup>121</sup> For this reason, human trafficking risks are being considered in transport projects such as the Northern Economic Corridor Project (see Chapter III.D.1).

A recent study of child trafficking in Lao PDR by the MLSW and UNICEF confirms many of these and other concerns. The study, which was conducted throughout the country, found the following.

- Sixty percent of the trafficking victims identified through the research were females between the ages of 12 and 18.
- Victims were disproportionately from ethnic minority (non-Lao-Tai) backgrounds and all of the minority victims were from recently relocated villages or households.
- Among those trafficked to Thailand, about a third were for sexual exploitation, another third for domestic service and the rest for factory work, agricultural work, and commercial fishing.
- Young women from northwestern provinces (including Bokeo, Luang Namtha, Luang Prabang and Oudomxay) were trafficked mainly for sexual exploitation.
- From the northern provinces, young women have been trafficked to Myanmar and in even larger numbers to the PRC in addition to Thailand and other provinces.

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<sup>120</sup> Feingold, David A. 2000. "The Hell of Good Intentions: Some Preliminary Thoughts on Opium in the Political Ecology of the Trade in Girls and Women," in *Where China Meets Southeast Asia: Social & Cultural Change in the Border Regions*, edited by Grant Evans, Christopher Hutton and Kuah Khun Eng. Singapore and New York.

<sup>121</sup> "ILO Launches Plan to Fight Human Trafficking in China," *U.N. Wire*, 14 July 2003, available at [http://www.unwire.org/unwire/20030614/449\\_6536.asp](http://www.unwire.org/unwire/20030614/449_6536.asp).

- Young women from Houaphanh and Xiengkhouang were trafficked to Vientiane and other internal destinations for factory work and sexual exploitation.
- Several young women trafficked for sexual exploitation contracted HIV/AIDS and died;
- Young women trafficked into domestic service and sweatshop work endure long working hours, payment of low or no wages, beatings, and worse forms of abuse;
- Some young women trafficked to garment factories in Vientiane report that their drinking water was laced with methamphetamines to keep them alert.
- Seventeen percent of the children identified through the study have simply disappeared.
- Trafficking networks in both Lao PDR and Thailand are extensive (reaching as far north as Phongsaly) and operate with the complicity of police, military, and local officials.
- Trafficking victims may be arrested and fined in Thailand and may also be detained and fined upon their return to Lao PDR (although the penalties can differ widely from one district to another).;
- Traffickers rarely are prosecuted and punished.<sup>122</sup>

This research underscores the vulnerabilities of ethnic minority girls and young women to trafficking, both internally and in Thailand. Young people from relocated villages appear to be especially vulnerable. Young ethnic Lao women and men are also trafficked, but they are more likely to fall in the category of irregular migrants. (While irregular migrants travel to Thailand voluntarily, they may still be exploited by employers and abused by police because of their undocumented status.) The research also suggests a need to focus on internal as well as cross-border trafficking, and to consider the PRC and Myanmar as potential trafficking destinations in addition to Thailand.

To deal with the growing number of Lao migrants working in Thailand without work permits, the Governments of Lao PDR and Thailand have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to regularize the work status of more migrants.<sup>123</sup> More recently, Lao PDR and five other GMS countries signed an MOU to jointly combat human trafficking as well.<sup>124</sup> To address growing concerns about trafficking, the Government recently established a high-level commission on trafficking in women and children and anti-trafficking chapters within MLSW and the Immigration Department. (The MLSW chapter, supported by the UN Interagency Project on Trafficking in Women and Children, UNICEF and others, is coordinating several projects in data collection and research, awareness raising among young people and other vulnerable groups, and in reintegration of trafficking survivors who return from Thailand and elsewhere.) The National Tourism Authority

<sup>122</sup> MLSW and UNICEF. 2004, op. cit.

<sup>123</sup> Governments of Lao PDR and Thailand. 2002. *Memorandum of Understanding on Employment Cooperation*. However, it has been noted that this agreement does not expressly cover Lao children working in Thailand.

<sup>124</sup> Governments of Cambodia, PRC, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. 2004. *Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation against Trafficking in Persons in the Greater Mekong Subregion*.

has also sponsored workshops for its staff and for industry representatives on trafficking risks and responses. As noted earlier, trafficking risks are also being considered in major transport projects.

The recently passed Law on the Development and Protection of Women prohibits trafficking in women and children and provides for the rights of victims, assistance to victims, and criminal penalties for traffickers and their accomplices. Several provisions of the Lao Penal Code can also be used to prosecute trafficking-related offenses. For example, Article 92 prohibits the trading or abduction of persons; Article 119 establishes criminal penalties for rape; and Articles 122 and 123 prohibit prostitution and procuring for prostitution. The Labour Law also prohibits forced labor (Article 4), employment of women in potentially injurious work and night work (Article 33), and strenuous work during and shortly after pregnancy (Article 34).<sup>125</sup>

The NRDS gender strategy includes several recommendations to address unsafe migration and human trafficking. These include:

- producing “safe migration” messages for local radio broadcasts in several ethnic languages and posters for transit stops and border crossings;
- developing 1 training materials in life skills for primary schools, nonformal education courses, and health care programs (aimed especially at ethnic minority youth);
- training border officials to recognize possible instances of trafficking and to deal appropriately with traffickers and trafficking victims;
- reviewing provincial and district travel rules and sanctions on illegal travel to ensure that victims of trafficking are not penalized on their return;
- developing supportive return and reintegration programs for victims involving the provincial and district LWU and Lao Youth Union;
- coordinating national and provincial authorities to monitor border crossings, to track suspicious recruiters and missing children, to provide safety nets for migrant workers, and to repatriate victims.

Large numbers of young Lao workers will continue to migrate to Thailand to fill the shortages of unskilled workers there and to experience the modern lifestyle depicted on Thai television. The long and porous border between Lao PDR and Thailand is extremely difficult to police, and therefore the vast majority of Lao migrants will continue to enter Thailand without work permits. It would be advantageous for the Government to negotiate further increases in the ceilings on regularized migrants under the labor MOU with Thailand. The Government could also work with the Thai government and NGOs to develop better safety nets for Lao migrants in Thailand. In addition, the Human Resources Working Group within the GMS provides a forum for harmonizing skill requirements across GMS countries and for expanding opportunities for Lao youth—especially young women and ethnic minorities—to attend technical and vocational schools in Thailand and other GMS countries.

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<sup>125</sup> The *Trafficking in Persons Report 2004* issued by the US Department of State places Lao PDR on its “Tier 2 Watch List,” which means the United States considers that Lao PDR is not yet fully complying with the minimum standards for eliminating trafficking, but is making substantial efforts to do so. If Lao PDR were to slip to Tier 3 in the US’s ranking scheme, it would be subject to possible sanctions.

#### **4. International Commitments on Gender and Regional Integration**

Attention to gender issues in regional integration furthers a number of Lao PDR's international and regional commitments. These include commitments to cooperate with other countries to promote gender equality and socially inclusive development and to address the negative social impacts of economic integration. For example, the Beijing Platform for Action includes a number of commitments to promote gender equality in the context of increasing trade and mobility and emphasizes the importance of cooperation among countries to achieve these goals. The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development also includes commitments to address the conditions of migrant workers including through bilateral and multilateral negotiations.

At the regional level, the Declaration on the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Region (signed in 1988) and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the ASEAN Region (signed in 2004) include commitments to regional and bilateral cooperation in these areas. The ASEAN Concord II signed in 2003 establishes three areas of cooperation—political and security, economic and socio-cultural—and emphasizes that these areas are closely linked and mutually reinforcing. ASEAN's sociocultural area emphasizes the importance of actively involving women and youth; cooperating to prevent and control HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases; and promoting regional mobility, development of skills, and mutual recognition of credentials. ASEAN's security area also includes cooperation to address trafficking in persons and other transnational crimes.

In the area of trade, the Beijing Platform for Action recognizes the benefits and risks of increasing economic integration and the particular vulnerabilities of women migrant workers. In the platform, governments commit to ensure that national policies related to international and regional trade agreements do not have adverse impacts on women's new and traditional economic activities and to take positive action to involve women in the formulation of trade and other economic policies. ASEAN's work program includes studies on the social implications of trade agreements such as the WTO General Agreement on Trade in Services, the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, and AFTA.

In relation to tourism, the Beijing Platform commits governments to take measures to eliminate sex tourism. The ASEAN Tourism Agreement signed in 2002 similarly commits Lao PDR and other ASEAN members to take, "...stern measures to prevent tourism-related abuse and exploitation of people, particularly women and children." The Agreement also includes measures to monitor the impact of tourism on local communities, culture, and nature and to prevent exploitation of cultural heritage and natural resources.

The Beijing Platform commits governments to undertake gender-sensitive initiatives to address HIV/AIDS and other STDs. In their Declaration on HIV/AIDS signed in 2001, ASEAN members also stressed that gender equality and the empowerment of women are fundamental to the reduction of women's and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. The joint regional actions endorsed in

the declaration include reducing the HIV vulnerability of mobile populations and providing them with access to information, care, and treatment.

Lao PDR has made a number of international and regional commitments related to migration and human trafficking. In 2003, Lao PDR became a party to the new UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols on trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants. Article 6 of CEDAW commits state parties to suppress all forms of traffic in women, and Article 15.4 guarantees women equal rights with men in relation to travel. Article 35 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child similarly requires parties to take, "...all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form." Articles 32 and 34 commit governments to protecting children from economic or sexual exploitation. The Beijing Platform commits governments to cooperate in addressing trafficking in women and children and to ensure that migrant women are aware of their rights and have recourse in the event those rights are violated.

In October 2004, the Governments of Cambodia, PRC, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam signed a groundbreaking MOU to combat human trafficking in the GMS as part of the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiatives against Trafficking that is supported by several institutions including ADB. The MOU includes commitments to cooperate in the areas of (i) policy; (ii) legal frameworks, law enforcement, and practice; (iii) protection, recovery, and reintegration; (iv) prevention; and (v) implementation mechanisms including a subregional plan of action that is expected to be prepared by early 2005.

## **Chapter IV                      National Laws, Policies, and Institutions**

### **Promoting Gender Equality**

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#### **A.            International Commitments**

Lao PDR is a party to several international treaties that promote gender equality. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which it ratified in 1981, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which it joined in 1991. Lao PDR also has signed but not yet ratified the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on Civil and Political Rights.

In 1996, Lao PDR submitted its first report on implementation of the CRC to the CRC expert committee which considered the report and published its concluding observations in 1997. The expert committee's recommendations included (i) community awareness-raising on the negative effects of early marriage; (ii) measures to address domestic violence and sexual abuse of children; (iii) efforts to extend primary health care and primary education; (iv) steps to prevent economic exploitation of children, child prostitution and trafficking, child pornography, and drug abuse among children; and (v) reforms in the administration of juvenile justice.<sup>126</sup>

In February 2003, Lao PDR submitted its first report on the implementation of CEDAW to the CEDAW expert committee.<sup>127</sup> The committee is scheduled to consider the report at its January 2005 session. Based on the concluding comments of the CEDAW committee on reports submitted recently by other GMS countries, the committee is likely to focus on (i) the representation of women in public decision making; (ii) the effectiveness of national institutions to promote gender equality; (iii) girls' completion rates in school and women's literacy; (iv) women's health and women's and men's use of contraceptives; (v) the status of women migrant workers and cross-border trafficking in women and girls; (vi) women and girls' involvement in commercial sex work; (vii) the needs of rural and ethnic minority women; (viii) sexual harassment and domestic violence; (ix) women's employment opportunities, land ownership, and access to credit; and (x) traditional stereotypes of women and men.<sup>128</sup>

Lao PDR has ratified only four ILO conventions, including the Forced Labour Convention (No. 29), the Night Work (Women) Convention (No. 4) and the Night Work of Young Persons

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<sup>126</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. 1997. *Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Lao PDR*. CRC/C/15/Add.78 (10 Oct. 1997).

<sup>127</sup> CEDAW Report, op. cit.

<sup>128</sup> See, e.g., UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (UNCEDAW). 2001. *Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Twenty-fifth Session* (concluding comments on Viet Nam report). U.N. Doc. A/56/38; UNCEDAW. 1999. *Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Twentieth Session* (concluding comments on Thailand and PRC reports). U.N. Doc. A/54/38.

(Industry) Convention (No. 6). However, as an ILO member, Lao PDR is bound to enforce the core labor standards included in the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. These include nondiscrimination in employment, equal pay for equivalent work, elimination of forced labor and the worst forms of child labor, and the rights to organize and bargain collectively.<sup>129</sup>

In September 2003, Lao PDR became a party to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children and the Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, both of which supplement the new UN Convention Against Organized Crime. In relation to human trafficking and related offenses, Lao PDR was already a party to the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others and the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery.

Lao PDR has also participated in international and regional conferences related to gender equality and women's rights (e.g., the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995) and has committed to implement outcome documents such as the Beijing Platform for Action and the Cairo Programme of Action. As discussed earlier, the Lao Government has also set national targets to achieve the MDGs.

## **B. Constitution and Laws**

Lao PDR has a sound legal framework to support gender equality and women's empowerment. The Constitution adopted in 1991 provides that, "Lao citizens, irrespective of their sex...are all equal before the law" (Article 22) and that, "Lao citizens of both sexes enjoy equal rights in political, economic, cultural, social and family affairs" (Article 24). The Constitution also guarantees all Lao citizens the right to education, work, freedom of movement, and residence (Articles 25-27).

The Law on the Development and Protection of Women was passed by the National Assembly in October 2004. The law elaborates on the constitutional guarantee of male and female equality in political, economic, cultural, social, and family affairs. The law also accords certain special rights and priorities to women related to work during pregnancy, maternity leave and benefits, divorce, criminal matters, and health care. (Similar special provisions are found in other laws such as the Labour Law and the Penal Code as discussed further below.) The law also includes provisions on the prevention of domestic violence and trafficking in women and children, the rights of victims of domestic violence and trafficking, measures to assist and protect victims, and criminal and civil penalties for offenders.

The principle of equality is reflected in several other national laws. The 1990 Law on Lao Nationality does not distinguish between men and women in relation to acquiring or retaining nationality, and children of a Lao citizen can acquire Lao nationality upon the parent's request,

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<sup>129</sup> ILO. 1998. *ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*. Geneva.

regardless of the parent's sex. The 1997 Electoral Law provides that, "...[a]ll Lao citizens, irrespective of their sex,...who are over 18 years of age, have the right to vote," [and] "...any one over 21 years of age has the right to be elected as a National Assembly member" (Article 3). It also provides that, "...National Assembly members shall include appropriate proportions of the representatives of people of different strata, sex, and ethnic minorities" (Article 7). The 2000 Education Law provides equal rights in education while the 2001 Law on Hygiene and Health guarantees equal rights to health services.

The 1994 Labour Law requires nondiscrimination in employment (Article 2) and equal pay for work of equal quantity, quality, and value (Article 39). The law also includes provisions intended to protect women from harmful work and to address their reproductive roles. These include restrictions on dangerously heavy work and night work (Article 33); heavy or strenuous work during pregnancy and within 6 months after delivery and confinement (Article 34); and requirements for maternity leave and maternity benefits (Articles 35-36). The restrictions on dangerously heavy work and night work have been criticized for reinforcing traditional assumptions that women should only perform "light" work.<sup>130</sup> A more general problem is that the law is not strongly enforced. For example, a recent GRID survey of Lao women found that over 90% of the Government employees surveyed received paid maternity leave, but that 40% of private sector employees surveyed had received no paid leave.<sup>131</sup>

The 1990 Family Law provides generally that, "...[m]en and women have equal rights in all aspects pertaining to family relations" (Article 2) and guarantees women and men equal rights to marry on the basis of mutual consent (Article 9), to make joint decisions on family matters including place of residence (Articles 13-14), to engage in political, economic, cultural and social activities (Article 14), to choose a family name (Article 15), to divorce (Article 20), and to seek alimony (Article 24). The Family Law sets 18 years as the minimum age for marriage, but permits marriage at a younger age (as low as 15 years) in, "...special and necessary cases" (Article 9). The law also establishes monogamy as the governing marriage system (Article 4).

Despite these provisions in the Family Law, recent surveys and studies have documented that traditional norms continue to govern marriage and family decision making particularly in rural areas. For example, the Lao Reproductive Health Survey 2000 found that over 5% of the women surveyed were younger than 15 years when first married and around 25% were younger than 17 years.<sup>132</sup> The recent GRID survey on the situation of Lao women found that among ethnic Lao, wives make most decisions on daily expenditures while husbands or husbands and wives together make decisions about important matters such as building a house or buying land. In contrast, among some ethnic minorities men are more likely to make household decisions on daily expenditures, and are far more likely to make important decisions such as house building.<sup>133</sup> The PPA documented the continuing practice of polygyny in several ethnic groups and found that some

<sup>130</sup> LWU/GRID. 2003. *A Country Gender Analysis and Profile of the Lao PDR* (August 2003 draft). Vientiane.

<sup>131</sup> LWU/GRID 2000b, op. cit.

<sup>132</sup> NSC 2001, op. cit.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.



husbands had threatened to stop working and smoke opium if their first wives did not consent to a second wife.<sup>134</sup> While it is becoming more common for women in Vientiane to divorce their husbands, there continue to be strong community pressures in rural areas against women seeking divorce even in cases of domestic violence or drug addiction.

The 1990 Contract Law provides that any person at least 18 years old can enter into a contract and that the same conditions apply to loans. In practice, however, banks typically have required the signature of the “head of the household”—usually a man—on personal loan documents.<sup>135</sup> The 1990 Property Law distinguishes between (i) assets owned by a husband or wife before marriage or acquired through inheritance or a specific gift and (ii) assets acquired by a married couple during their married life (“conjugal property”). Whereas the assets in the first category belong solely to the person who acquired them, a husband and wife have equal rights to conjugal property (Article 26). Similarly, the 1990 Inheritance Law distinguishes between “original assets” (owned by a husband or wife before marriage or acquired through inheritance or a specific gift) and “acquired assets” (acquired by a married couple during their married life). When someone dies without leaving a valid will, the Inheritance Law provides that the deceased person’s original assets pass to his or her children while acquired assets pass in two parts, half to the surviving spouse and the other half divided in equal portions among the children (Article 16).

As several studies have pointed out, the Inheritance Law is at odds with the customary inheritance practices of most Lao ethnic groups. Ethnic Lao communities have traditionally followed bilateral inheritance practices, but the youngest child—often a daughter—has traditionally inherited the family home. On the other hand, some ethnic groups such as the Hmong have traditionally followed patrilineal inheritance practices, under which land and other substantial assets pass only to the male children.<sup>136</sup> However, recent studies have also identified variations in inheritance patterns even among patrilineal groups.<sup>137</sup> Inheritance practices are also likely to change as more people move to urban centers; as rural villages relocate or are amalgamated with other villages; and as land is subject to allocation, registration, and titling. (The impact of land allocation and titling is discussed further below.) Some observers have seen a tendency for non-Lao ethnic households to adopt more bilateral kinship and inheritance patterns when they move closer to ethnic Lao communities or to urban centers. However, for poor families with small land holdings and few other assets, it will often not be feasible to divide the family land equally among all descendants.

The 1998 Land Law is gender-neutral in principle and provides for the names of both husband and wife to be recorded in the land register (Article 43). However, for inherited land, this provision is also at odds with the traditional inheritance practices of many ethnic groups. As noted above, in ethnic Lao communities the family home often was inherited by the youngest daughter

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<sup>134</sup> PPA, op. cit.

<sup>135</sup> Lao PDR. 2003. *Report on the Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (Final Draft) (CEDAW Report). Vientiane.

<sup>136</sup> See, e.g., ADB. 1996, op cit; LWU/GRID 2000b, op. cit.; Ireson-Doolittle and Moreno-Black, op. cit.; PPA, op. cit.

<sup>137</sup> See, e.g., Rodenburg and Phengkhai, op. cit.

while in Hmong and other patrilineal groups family land passed generally to sons. During the preparation of the Land Law, the LWU lobbied to protect ethnic Lao women's traditional right to inherit family land.<sup>138</sup> The LWU was alarmed by evidence that land was being registered in the name of the "head of the household"—usually the husband—even where the land had been inherited by the wife. (Less attention was paid to the land inheritance practices of other ethnic groups). This led to the inclusion in the Land Law of Article 43 on joint land registration. As a result, considerable attention was also paid to gender awareness in the Land Titling Project supported by the World Bank and AusAID.<sup>139</sup>

Recent data from the Land Titling Project show success in raising the awareness of government staff and participating communities about women's land rights with close to 40% of land titles issued to women and about 30% in joint ownership.<sup>140</sup> This was not surprising as the project was limited to urban and peri-urban areas, and about 60% of titling was in Vientiane. However, other recent studies have suggested that greater attention needs to be paid to gender issues in the allocation of agricultural and forest land, especially in non-Lao ethnic areas. For example, a survey of four provinces by the LWU compared data on land ownership with the names on land documents (including not only land titles but also temporary land use certificates and land tax documents). It found that although only 20% of the land parcels included in the survey originated in the husband's family, close to 60% of the related land documents named only the husband as owner.<sup>141</sup> A study of land allocation and land use planning in rural areas under the Lao-Swedish Forestry Programme found that husbands' and wives' names were listed on temporary land use certificates issued for agricultural land, but the forms required only one signature and were typically signed by the husband. In the villages surveyed, women were less informed about the land allocation process, partly because of language barriers in communicating with government staff who did not make specific efforts to involve the women in consultations or training.<sup>142</sup>

The 1989 Penal Code is generally gender-neutral; however, it allows for mitigation of criminal responsibility and forbids severe penalties such as life imprisonment and death in the case of pregnant defendants (Articles 29-30 and 36). Criminal offenses are defined in gender-neutral terms except for rape which is defined as an offense only against women and girls (Article 119). The definition of rape also excludes marital rape. As discussed previously, the recently passed Law on the Development and Protection of Women includes provisions on domestic violence and trafficking in women and children. Several provisions of the Penal Code can be used to prosecute trafficking-related offenses. For example, Article 92 prohibits trading or abduction of persons; Articles 119 and 120 penalize rape; and Articles 122 and 123 prohibit prostitution and procuring for prostitution. Article 4 of the Labour Law also prohibits forced labor.

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<sup>138</sup> Viravong, op. cit.

<sup>139</sup> Schenk-Sandbergen et al., op. cit.

<sup>140</sup> Lao Consulting Group, op. cit.

<sup>141</sup> LWU/GRID. 2000 (revised). *Gender & Land Documents: How Do Society's Perceptions of Gender Affect Women?* Vientiane.

<sup>142</sup> Rodenburg and Phengkay, op. cit.

Lao PDR's Constitution and laws are relatively new, and there is little awareness among Lao women of their constitutional and legal rights. This is especially true for rural and ethnic minority women who have low literacy levels and little experience in dealing with government institutions, including courts. The LWU has conducted legal awareness-raising workshops for women and recently began providing legal counseling to women through its Vientiane office. LWU has also been involved in raising awareness on gender issues in the land titling project.

### **C. National Policies**

A number of national policies also support gender equality and improvements in women's capabilities. These include the Development Plan for Lao Women (1998-2003) that includes goals and programs to promote Lao women's legal awareness; to improve their education, skill levels, health, nutrition, and income-generating opportunities; and to reduce their workloads. (It is expected that a new strategic action plan for the advancement of Lao women will be developed by the newly established National Commission for the Advancement of Women discussed further below.) The National Population and Development Policy (1999) includes a number of measures to improve and expand reproductive health and family planning services and to generally improve the status of women. An Education for All Action Plan is also being prepared and will include strategies to reduce gender gaps in education.

The Government's Five-Year Socio-Economic Development Plan (2001-2005) does not directly address gender issues or gender disparities; however, it includes targets for improvements in primary and secondary school enrollments and literacy and for improvements in primary health care specifically including reproductive health services and family planning. The plan also calls for developing the capacity of female and ethnic minority staff in government offices especially at the provincial and district levels.

In contrast, the NGPES specifically identifies gender equity as a cross-sectoral concern relevant to both poverty reduction and to socioeconomic development. The NGPES also includes a gender strategy for poverty reduction that focuses in particular on the four main NGPES sectors (agriculture and forestry, education, health and transport).<sup>143</sup> (The NGPES gender strategy is discussed in more detail in Chapter III.A.5.)

With support from ADB, the LWU recently developed guidelines for a national gender action plan to mainstream gender-aware approaches and gender equity goals across all key economic and social sectors.<sup>144</sup> The draft guidelines were submitted to the Prime Minister's office for approval in 2003. It is expected that a final version of the guidelines will be used by the newly created NCAW to carry out its mandate to develop a national policy and strategic action plan for gender equality and the advancement of women.

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<sup>143</sup> NGPES, op. cit., Chapter 6.1 and Annex 3 (Table 3.5 – Gender Strategy Matrix).

<sup>144</sup> ADB. 2001. Technical Assistance to Lao PDR for *Capacity Building of the Lao Women's Union*. Manila.

#### **D. National Commission for the Advancement of Women**

In May 2002, the Government agreed to establish NCAW as the central institution to promote gender equality and women's advancement in Lao PDR. A Prime Minister's decree issued in April 2003 outlines the role and functions, rights and obligations, structure, and work arrangements for the NCAW.<sup>145</sup>

The NCAW is a high-level body chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs who is also Deputy Prime Minister. The vice-chairs are the President of the LWU and the Vice President of CPC. Other members include Vice Ministers from the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministries of Education, Health, Labour and Social Welfare, Justice, Information and Culture, National Security, Agriculture and Forestry, and Industry and Handicrafts. The NCAW decree also provides for subsidiary bodies at the central level in line ministries (chaired by the minister), at the provincial level (chaired by the governor), and at the village level (chaired by the village head). The NCAW has a small secretariat that will initially be located in the LWU. The NCAW's budget will also be managed by the LWU.

The mandate of the NCAW is to assist the Government in formulating policies and strategies to promote women's advancement in all areas and to coordinate with both local authorities and international organizations to promote gender equality and to eliminate discrimination against women. The Commission's tasks include (i) developing a national policy and strategic action plan for women's advancement; (ii) preparing guidelines to integrate gender considerations in all areas of work at central and local levels; (iii) issuing guidelines on the Government's international commitments, laws and policies related to women's advancement; (iv) supporting and monitoring the work of central and local authorities; (v) coordinating with international organizations; and (vi) preparing national progress reports on Lao PDR's implementation of its international commitments and national plans for women's advancement. The NCAW may also provide general policy guidance to the Government, conduct national campaigns (for example, to raise awareness of CEDAW), and organize consultations and other activities to monitor progress toward gender equality and women's advancement.

Since the NCAW was only recently established, it is not yet clear how it will function and what its priorities will be. As a high-level body including representatives of all line ministries and CPC, the NCAW has the potential to "mainstream" gender equality goals in Government planning and gender-sensitive programs in all of the key economic and social sectors. This will be a challenging project, requiring high-level political commitment and an adequate commitment of staff and other resources, especially within the line ministries and provinces. It is unrealistic to expect a small secretariat located in the LWU to perform all of the day-to-day work of the NCAW. The experience of Viet Nam's National Committee for the Advancement of Women that was established in 1993 suggests that the NCAW would benefit from the establishment of a national working group of senior or mid-level staff from each of the line ministries, and technical working

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<sup>145</sup> Lao PDR. 2003. Decree on the Establishment and Functioning of the National Commission for the Advancement of Women. Decree No. 37/PM (1 April 2003).

groups within each ministry.<sup>146</sup> A national working group could assist the NCAW in drafting the national policy and strategic action plan. Technical working groups could analyze gender issues and could identify capacity-building needs in the key sectors and develop sector action plans for key line ministries. A national working group and technical working groups could also meet periodically with staff from external agencies and NGOs, and thereby assist the NCAW in fulfilling its mandate to coordinate with international agencies.

#### **E. Lao Women’s Union and Gender Resource Information and Development Centre**

The LWU is one of four mass organizations authorized under Article 7 of the 1991 Constitution to mobilize the Lao people and protect their rights and interests.<sup>147</sup> The LWU originated as the Lao Patriotic Women’s Association that was founded in 1954 as a political mobilization arm of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party. In 1984, the Association changed its name to the LWU and reorganized itself into a more broad-based organization to support the development of Lao women as well as their political mobilization. These changes included the admission of non-Party members and restructuring into a four-tiered organization with representatives at the central, provincial, district, and village levels. By 1986, the LWU had established unions in each province and had representatives in each district to work with village unions. The LWU also established small offices in each of the central ministries.

In the 1980s, the LWU began to receive direct support from external agencies such as UNICEF and UNDP. This trend continued as more development agencies and NGOs sought to tap the LWU’s grassroots network in their rural development projects targeting women. Over the past 20 years, the LWU expanded its activities to support skill training, income generation, and financial assistance for ethnic minority and rural women; good health practices and family planning; awareness-raising about women’s rights, including in the workplace and in relation to land registration and titling; the establishment of women’s professional associations; and women’s advancement in the civil service and the National Assembly. More recently, the LWU started to address emerging issues such as domestic violence, HIV/AIDS, and human trafficking; however, political mobilization of Lao women remains a core mandate of the LWU. This mandate is

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<sup>146</sup> The National Committee is supported by a network of senior officials, most at the deputy director level. There is some concern that not all of the network members have expertise or interest in gender issues. In addition, their network activities are part-time, and are not separately funded, which limits their effectiveness. A technical working group was established in 1999 within the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). This working group is directly funded by over 70 donors to assist the network. So far, the working group has focused on policy and research, development of technical guidelines for gender integration in MARD activities, human resource development and capacity building. Stephanie Fahey. 2002. *Women in Viet Nam*. ADB Country Briefing Paper. Manila.

<sup>147</sup> The other mass organizations are the Lao Front for National Construction, Lao Federation of Trade Unions and Lao Youth Union.

encapsulated in the LWU's "three goods" motto: "good citizen, good development, good cultural family."<sup>148</sup>

In 1997, the LWU launched the GRID project, with support from NORAD, SUNV, and UNDP. The project is now in its second phase and has established GRID centres in Vientiane, Savannakhet, Xiengkhouang, Xayabury, and Luang Prabang to provide gender training, to conduct gender-related research, and to collect gender resources. Some of GRID's accomplishments include:

- coordination with the National Statistical Center (NSC) to collect and promote the use of statistics disaggregated by sex;
- collaboration with CPC to develop guidelines and to conduct training on gender-sensitive planning;
- gender-awareness and skill training for government staff at central and local levels and for mass media;
- quantitative and qualitative research on the situation of Lao women, women's participation in village decision making, gender and land, gender and energy, women entrepreneurs, and other topics;
- consultations with CPC and line ministries on integrating gender in the NGPES;
- preparation of a country gender analysis and profile;
- creation of a web site and production of newsletters, information sheets and brochures, posters, calendars and videos.<sup>149</sup>

ADB's country briefing paper on women noted both strengths and weaknesses in the LWU. As a mass organization, the LWU can play an important role in advocating women's concerns within both the Party and the Government. However, some women may be dissuaded from joining the LWU because of its Party affiliation. The LWU has an extremely effective grassroots network that has played a valuable role in implementing rural development, public health, and other projects especially in remote areas. However, the LWU's outreach to ethnic minority areas is constrained by the limited number of minority women in leadership positions. As more ministries and development agencies have sought to involve the LWU in their programs, there has been a tendency for LWU staff to become overextended. In many rural development projects, the project organizers have simply assumed that the local LWU will assist with community mobilization, but they have not adequately compensated the LWU staff for their time and expenses.

Until very recently, the LWU was the only Lao institution mandated to promote gender equality and women's rights. Its activities have encompassed high-level advocacy on legal and policy issues, gender training of Government staff, coordination with international agencies on gender issues, and implementation of a variety of development projects at both the central and

<sup>148</sup> When the motto was first coined in 1984, the "three goods" were "good citizen, good mother, good wife." LWU. 1998. *Development Plan for Lao Women (1998-2003)*. Vientiane; Ireson-Doolittle and Moreno-Black, op. cit.

<sup>149</sup> LWU/GRID 2003, op. cit.

grassroots levels. Now that the NCAW has been established, it will be important for the LWU to redefine its role so as to avoid overlap. Ideally, the LWU would build on its strengths: a high-level advocate for women's concerns within the Party and the Government, and an effective grassroots network to empower women at the local level.

Through the 1990s, a large number of external agencies and international NGOs supported projects specifically targeting women and girls and increasingly incorporated gender analysis and gender equality goals in their general development assistance programs in Lao PDR. (See Annex.) These two approaches mirrored general trends in international development over the period. The “women in development” approach that originated in the 1970s promoted projects specifically addressing the needs and constraints of women and girls. In contrast, the more recent “gender and development” approach stresses the gender biases inherent in social, economic, and political institutions and the need to address these structural biases through gender analysis; gender-aware planning; and gender-equitable project design, implementation, and monitoring. These approaches are not mutually exclusive. Where social norms or discriminatory laws restrict women’s access to basic services and resources, their economic opportunities, and their participation in community decision making, a combination of the two approaches may be needed to narrow gender gaps and pursue more gender-equitable development.

A number of external agencies and international NGOs working in Lao PDR are attempting to mainstream gender considerations in their overall country programs while still supporting woman-focused projects or project components. Woman-focused projects generally involve the LWU as well as the relevant line ministry. In areas such as girls’ education, family planning, and prevention of HIV/AIDS and other STDs, greater efforts are also being made to involve men (including village leaders) as well as women in awareness campaigns and other activities.

Woman-focused projects and project components continue to be supported in a wide range of areas including basic and informal education, vocational training, reproductive health, improved techniques in agriculture and small livestock raising, agroprocessing, handicraft production, and confidence-building to participate in village committees and user groups. NORAD, SIDA, UNDP, UNICEF, UNIFEM and other agencies have also provided direct support to LWU and GRID for capacity building, gender-related research and training, and law and policy reform. External agencies such as AusAID, GTZ, UNAIDS, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO as well as many international NGOs continue to work closely with the Ministries of Education and Health on gender-related projects.

In recent years, both multilateral and bilateral agencies have also been working with other line agencies to mainstream gender concerns in their sector programs. For example, UNIFEM has worked with the Government and the LWU for several years to promote the establishment of the NCAW (see Chapter IV.D). In the late 1990s, SIDA worked extensively with the Department of Forestry (within MAF) to develop a gender strategy and action plan, GAD guidelines, and other tools for the forestry sector. FAO, the Mekong River Commission, UNDP and others have also supported gender training in fisheries, irrigation and agricultural extension projects implemented by MAF. SIDA, the World Bank, and other agencies have partnered with Nam Saat (under the



Ministry of Health) to develop gender-equitable approaches in community water and sanitation projects. GTZ has also followed a gender mainstreaming approach in its rural development projects and support for SME development and nonformal skill training (where it has substantially exceeded its targets for women's participation).

Several international NGOs working in Lao PDR – including CARE, Lao Red Cross and World Vision – have recently taken steps to assess and improve the gender awareness and sensitivity of their international and national staff. These measures include surveys, workshops, training sessions, and the development of gender policies and action plans. These NGOs are also members of the Gender and Development Group (GDG), an affiliation of about 20 NGOs working in Lao PDR. The GDG's overall goal is to promote gender equality in Lao PDR by improving the quality of life for women and strengthening their position in society. The GDG began as an informal forum for networking and exchange of information on gender issues. In the mid-1990s, before the establishment of GRID, the GDG also organized gender-training sessions for NGO staff and started a small library of gender resources. The GDG continues to serve as a focal point for networking and exchange of information on gender-related issues and activities. In 2003, GDG also launched two participatory research projects on domestic violence in villages where its members are currently working.

There is currently no formal donor coordination group on gender issues in Lao PDR, although gender issues are addressed through the coordination mechanisms that do exist in the health and education sectors and on specific issues such as HIV/AIDS and human trafficking. The establishment of the NCAW presents an opportunity for more formal coordination between external agencies, international NGOs, and line ministries to promote gender equality. For example, if a working group of line ministry staff is formed to assist the NCAW, this working group could meet periodically with gender focal points from the external agencies and NGOs and could seek their technical support for specific tasks. The UN theme groups organized to work with the Government on the MDG progress report also provide a model for future coordination on gender issues.

## **Chapter VI                      ADB Gender Strategy and Recommendations**

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### **A.        ADB's Current Portfolio**

#### **1.        Previous Country Gender Strategy**

The 1996 country briefing paper on women outlined a comprehensive gender strategy for ADB's assistance program in Lao PDR. The gender strategy recognized that including gender considerations in ADB's country program would have practical development benefits and would contribute to more equitable development outcomes. The strategy recommended a three-part approach: (i) mainstreaming gender concerns in all of ADB's macroeconomic, sector, and project work; (ii) assisting the Government to strengthen its institutional mechanisms for promoting gender equity; and (iii) supporting some stand-alone projects to enhance women's skills and confidence.

To mainstream gender concerns, the strategy recommended (i) gender impact assessments prior to the design of specific projects and programs; (ii) gender sensitivity training for both foreign and Lao staff; (iii) consultations with women and the setting of minimum targets for women's participation in project activities; (iv) collection of data disaggregated by gender; and (v) independent monitoring of gender impacts of projects. To strengthen institutional mechanisms, the strategy recommended that ADB work with the LWU offices in sectoral ministries to provide on-the-job training in gender-responsive planning, data collection, analysis, and reporting. The strategy also recommended the creation of a ministry of women's affairs and noted the interest of other external agencies in setting up a women's research center. (As noted in Chapter V, the Government recently established the NCAW as a high-level mechanism to promote gender equality. In the late 1990s, the LWU also established GRID, with support from NORAD, UNDP, and other agencies to pursue gender-related research and training.)

In terms of sector priorities, the gender strategy recommended activities in several areas, including primary health care, family nutrition and food security, education (including primary and nonformal education and emphasizing the needs of ethnic minority women and girls), energy and transport, village-based savings and credit, women's legal rights and land tenure, and micro and small business development. The strategy noted the need to increase the number of female field staff such as provincial and district extension agents and proposed an internship program to provide young rural women with on-the-job training and work experience.

#### **2.        Recent Gender Mainstreaming Activities**

A number of recommendations in the country briefing paper on women have been implemented through subsequent loans and technical assistance, and through actions by the Government and other parties. For example, the Basic Education (Girls) Project,<sup>150</sup> co-financed

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<sup>150</sup> ADB. 1998. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Basic Education (Girls) Project*. Manila.

with AusAID, and the Primary Health Care Extension Project<sup>151</sup> are extending and improving basic services to more remote and ethnic minority areas in the northern provinces. Among other things, they are using innovative approaches to increase the number of ethnic minority teachers and health care workers, especially women. The Second Education Quality Improvement Project goes a step further and includes a comprehensive gender and ethnic minority strategy that is being implemented by the Gender and Ethnic Minority Unit within the Ministry of Education. There has also been improvement in the treatment of gender issues in loan projects in the agriculture and urban development sectors. This can be seen most clearly in the gender strategies incorporated in the Nam Ngum River Basin Sector Development Project, Decentralized Irrigation Development and Management Sector Project, Vientiane Urban Infrastructure and Services Project, Small Towns Development Sector Project, and new Northern Community-Managed Irrigation Project.<sup>152</sup>

ADB is also mainstreaming gender concerns in less traditional sectors. For example, the Mekong Tourism Development Project<sup>153</sup> includes a gender strategy framework to address both the opportunities and risks for women associated with tourism development. The East-West Corridor Project<sup>154</sup> approved in 1999 was one of the first ADB transport projects to recognize the risks of HIV/AIDS transmission and human trafficking associated with cross-border highway projects. The loan documents require the Governments of Lao PDR and Viet Nam to coordinate their HIV/AIDS prevention programs along the road corridor and require road construction contractors to include STD and HIV/AIDS awareness in their health and safety programs. The Northern Economic Corridor Project<sup>155</sup> goes a step further and includes a specific budget to address HIV/AIDS and human trafficking risks as well as land tenure and other issues through the social action plan for the project.

To support gender mainstreaming within the Government of Lao PDR, ADB recently provided technical assistance to the LWU to develop guidelines for a national gender action plan. It

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<sup>151</sup> ADB. 2000. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Primary Health Care Expansion Project*. Manila.

<sup>152</sup> ADB. 2002. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Nam Ngum River Basin Development Sector Project*. Manila; ADB. 2000. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Decentralized Irrigation Development and Management Sector Project*. Manila; ADB. 2001. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Vientiane Urban Infrastructure and Services Project*. Manila; ADB. 2003. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Small Towns Development Sector Project*. Manila; ADB. 2004. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Northern Community-Managed Irrigation Project*. Manila. However, this approach is not being followed consistently in all sectors. For example, while the *Nam Ngum River Basin Sector Development Project* includes a detailed gender action plan, the RRP for the *Smallholder Development Project*, also approved in late 2002, includes no discussion of gender issues and no gender-specific provisions. ADB. 2002. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Smallholder Development Project*. Manila.

<sup>153</sup> ADB. 2002. *RRP on Proposed Loans to the Kingdom of Cambodia, Lao PDR and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam for the Greater Mekong Subregion: Mekong Tourism Development Project*. Manila.

<sup>154</sup> ADB. 1999. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the East-West Corridor Project*. Manila.

<sup>155</sup> ADB. 2002. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Northern Economic Corridor Project*. Manila.

is expected that the guidelines will be a resource to the NCAW as it develops a national policy and strategic action plan for gender equality and women's advancement. ADB also recently supported the preparation of gender strategies for both the NGPES and the NRDS.

The poverty reduction grant funds that ADB recently established with bilateral funding are providing additional resources to support gender-related initiatives in Lao PDR and the GMS. For example, the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (JFPR) has supported HIV/AIDS prevention activities with high-risk groups in Lao PDR and other GMS countries. Another JFPR grant is being used to improve livelihoods of poor families in the project area of the Community-Managed Irrigation Sector Project.<sup>156</sup> The livelihood activities are being carried out by women's groups and other community-based groups. The poverty reduction fund supported by DFID is also funding a project to establish a national standard for Lao silk. This standard should increase the value of Lao silk in Thailand and overseas markets for skilled Lao weavers who are primarily women. A number of other gender-related grant proposals have recently been approved or are being processed. These include projects to market organic produce grown by women in ethnic minority areas, to examine gender inequality in access to land and other resources in ethnic minority areas, and to promote safe migration and prevent trafficking of women in the GMS. A new gender and development cooperation fund and new governance and environmental funds provide additional grant resources for gender capacity building, innovative pilot projects targeting women, law and policy reform for gender equality, and other initiatives.

### 3. Project Evaluations

There has not been a systematic evaluation of the gender impacts of ADB loans in Lao PDR. Moreover, most of the loan projects that expressly address gender issues are in the early stages of implementation. Project performance audit reports on older loan projects generally do not discuss gender-specific impacts or assume that women have benefited proportionately from the project. This is not surprising since earlier projects generally did not include gender-specific targets or indicators in their project frameworks and monitoring systems.

A recent special evaluation study of participatory approaches in forest and water resources management examined gender, ethnicity, and poverty issues in the Community-Managed Irrigation Sector Project and the Decentralized Irrigation Development and Management Sector Project.<sup>157</sup> Both projects include provisions for encouraging women's participation in project activities, including targets for women's participation in water user associations. The study found that in the community-managed project, women had contributed more than half of the village construction and maintenance inputs. Efforts had also been made to ensure at least 30% women in user association management; however, this had not been achieved in remote, ethnic minority villages where relatively few women speak Lao and have little experience in public situations. On average, women represented 22% of participants in training activities. The study recommended a more

<sup>156</sup> ADB. 1996. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Community-Managed Irrigation Project*. Manila.

<sup>157</sup> ADB. 2004. *Special Evaluation Study of Participatory Approaches in Forest and Water Resource Operations in Selected Developing Member Countries*. Manila.

systematic approach to gender and women's participation, including more awareness raising and training for women. The study also noted that the lack of minority language speakers among the project consultants and local government staff operated to exclude ethnic minority women from project activities; some extension workers dealt only with men. However, the study did note that a more systematic gender mainstreaming approach was being followed in the decentralized irrigation project.<sup>158</sup>

Detailed recommendations related to gender were also included in the project performance audit report for the Theun-Hinboun Hydropower Project. The report noted that in the resettled villages, women lacked confidence to participate in group decision making. It recommended that steps should be taken early in a resettlement or mitigation program to build women's confidence and encourage men to share responsibility for decision making.<sup>159</sup> This is particularly important since women's livelihood activities like river gardens and collection of NTFPs are often disrupted by hydropower projects. These projects also bring large crews of foreign construction workers into remote areas which can potentially introduce health and social risks to women and girls living in the area.

#### **4. Implementation Issues**

In contrast to the resident missions in Cambodia, Viet Nam, and other DMCs, the Lao resident mission (LRM) does not have a full-time gender specialist on its national staff.<sup>160</sup> The gender focal point in LRM is currently the project implementation officer in charge of ADB's social sector loans. She does not have the time or mandate to monitor the implementation of gender strategies in loan projects outside her area of responsibility. ADB review missions continue to focus mainly on procurement, disbursements and project management issues. However, as in most other DMCs, line ministries such as MAF and MCTPC still have limited capacity to implement participatory and gender-equitable approaches in specific projects. As a result, the implementation and monitoring of gender-related activities largely depends on the project implementation consultants who may only be engaged for limited periods over the life of a project. Recent experience in several sectors shows that mid-course adjustments are often needed to adapt participation and gender strategies to the cultural and environmental conditions in particular areas especially where there is a diversity of ethnic groups. This suggests the need for a complementary approach. For example, an experienced gender specialist living in Lao PDR could be engaged to

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<sup>158</sup> The study also noted the mid-term finding that the project was not benefiting the poorest farmers, including the landless and those dependent on upland farming. As a result, the JFPR-funded Community-Managed Livelihood Improvement Project was started in 2002 to provide various types of livelihood support to non-irrigation farmers in the project area. The JFPR project does not include a specific gender strategy, but it is being implemented with substantial involvement of NGOs, which have considerable experience in working with women in village-level development activities.

<sup>159</sup> ADB. 2002. *PPAR on the Theun-Hinboun Hydropower Project (Loan 1329-LAO[SF]) in the Lao People's Democratic Republic*. Manila.

<sup>160</sup> Local gender specialists are now working in nine resident missions. Three are national staff positions; the remaining six positions are consultants engaged under a RETA with funding from the GAD Cooperation Fund.

periodically monitor the implementation of gender strategies in selected ADB loan projects and to suggest any needed mid-course adjustments to relevant staff in LRM and ADB.

Another issue relates to the budget allocated under ADB loans for the implementation of project gender strategies and related activities. The recent experience in the East-West and Northern Economic Corridor projects illustrates the importance of ensuring that funds are specifically allocated under a loan for the activities specified in a gender, social, or ethnic minority action plan. Given the scarce resources and capacity of line ministries, it is unrealistic to assume that these activities will be funded and implemented by a line ministry or the LWU solely on the basis of an assurance in the project loan agreement. There is also a tendency to underestimate the time and resources needed for awareness-raising and social mobilization activities. For example, the gender strategy in the Vientiane Urban Infrastructure and Services Project was extremely well received by NGOs and other local stakeholders, but many felt that the strategy was underfunded, which could impair its scope and impact.

## **B. New Policy Environment**

### **1. Changes in Lao Government Policies**

There have been a number of developments in the Lao economy and in Government policies and institutions that affect the future direction of ADB's support to Lao PDR on gender equality. Despite the dampening effect of the Asian financial crisis, the Government has set ambitious goals for further liberalizing the Lao economy, promoting foreign investment, and expanding trade and transport links with its GMS neighbors. These trends open up new opportunities and risks for both women and men. However, women and girls in urban areas and lowland communities are generally better positioned to respond to these changes compared with women and girls in remote ethnic minority areas. Meanwhile, government policies to stabilize shifting cultivation, to eradicate opium cultivation, to expand rural road networks, and to relocate remote villages closer to roads and basic services are rapidly changing livelihood systems and community structures in these remote areas. As in other countries, women are the main "shock absorbers" in rural households and rely on various coping strategies to meet the food and other basic needs of their families during stressful periods. As a result, their own health and well being can suffer. The increasing migration of young people to urban areas and to neighboring countries for seasonal employment is also having a profound effect on rural communities and on the expectations and behavior of Lao youth. However, this new mobility also poses health and other risks, especially for girls from remote areas with limited education and life skills.

While the Government pursues its ambitious target of graduating from least developed country status by 2020, it is also concerned about evidence of increasing economic inequality between urban and rural areas and among provinces. The PPA and other poverty studies have also improved understanding of the non-income dimensions of poverty, including poor health, illiteracy, and overwork that especially afflict women in upland farming villages. The NGPES represents the Government's new framework for pursuing development in a manner that balances economic growth, human development, social and ethnic cohesion, and sound environmental management.

Through the NGPES, the Government also aims to make further progress toward its national targets for achieving the MDGs. In addition, the NGPES provides a new platform for promoting gender equality in Lao PDR since it establishes gender as an inter-sectoral priority and includes a gender strategy and action plan covering all of the key NGPES sectors (see Chapter III.A.5). The recently established NCAW also provides a high-level mechanism for mainstreaming gender concerns in all key sectors and Government programs (see Chapter IV.D).

## **2. Changes in ADB Strategies and Policies**

Policy developments within ADB also shape the future direction of its gender-related assistance to Lao PDR. In 1998, ADB approved a gender and development Policy that replaced its original women-in-development-oriented policy and confirmed ADB's commitment to, "...mainstream gender concerns in all of its operational activities. With the adoption of its poverty reduction strategy in 1999, ADB made poverty reduction its overarching goal with gender equity a cross-cutting priority. This is reflected in the 2001 Poverty Reduction Partnership Agreement between ADB and Lao PDR in which gender is a key cross-cutting concern. Similarly, the Country Strategy and Program (2002-2004) for Lao PDR highlights regional, ethnic, and gender equity as priority themes. Its gender strategy calls for (i) mainstreaming gender concerns in development planning and individual projects; (ii) targeting women and girls through education, primary health care, water supply, and agriculture projects; (iii) strengthening the capacity of the LWU to address gender inequities; (iv) ensuring adequate representation of women in consultations and promoting gender balance in institutions supported by ADB; and (v) supporting gender-equitable reforms in areas such as land titling and allocation.

## **3. Forward-looking ADB Programs in Lao PDR and the Greater Mekong Subregion**

The future direction of ADB's program of assistance to Lao PDR is likely to be shaped by several key policy and planning documents. These include the NGPES, the NRDS recently prepared with ADB support, and ADB's new regional cooperation strategy and program (RCSP) for the GMS. Like the NGPES, the NRDS includes a comprehensive gender strategy that covers all key sectors and areas such as governance and regional cooperation. The RCSP also recognizes gender equality and the empowerment of women as major agendas for the GMS. In addition, the RCSP calls attention to the "new poverty paradigm" emerging in the GMS. Within this paradigm, communities in remote areas are experiencing greater food insecurity due to increasing pressures on local natural resources. These communities also have limited access to basic services and are vulnerable to encroachment and exploitation by outsiders. The RCSP confirms the continuing importance of human development investments to address these vulnerabilities and to reduce non-income poverty. Regional technical assistance is recommended as a vehicle for analyzing and addressing the risks posed by cross-border migration and increasing labor mobility such as the transmission of communicable diseases, human and drug trafficking, and the exploitation of child labor. The RCSP also notes that the GMS governments are seeking greater support from ADB to maximize the social benefits of regional cooperation. Possible initiatives in this area include harmonization of skill certification requirements, strengthening of labor standards, and upgrading

of indigenous skills and knowledge. These regional issues have a strong gender dimension and are particularly relevant to women and girls in Lao PDR who are at a competitive disadvantage in the GMS labor market because of their limited education and skills.

## **C. Country Gender Strategy**

### **1. Context**

The situation analysis and recommendations in the ADB's country briefing paper on women are still extremely valid and relevant; however, it is appropriate to update ADB's gender strategy for Lao PDR to take account of the Government's forward-looking commitments to the MDGs, to poverty reduction, and to further economic liberalization and integration in the GMS and ASEAN. An updated gender strategy should also reflect the priorities in the NRDS, which ADB intends to support through its geographical focus on the northern region of Lao PDR, and in the RCSP for the GMS that will guide ADB's subregional activities. The gender strategy also needs to take account of the current pipelines of ADB loans and grant-based assistance to Lao PDR. (See Table 7 at end of this chapter.)

ADB's current focus on narrowing gender gaps in basic education and health and on promoting women's participation in rural and urban development continues to be valid. Given ADB's geographical focus on the northern provinces, it will also continue to be important to address the particular hardships and constraints of ethnic minority women. ADB has considerably strengthened its approach to gender issues in recent loan projects, particularly where the project design includes a comprehensive gender strategy or action plan. ADB should carefully monitor the implementation of these strategies and plans and should incorporate successful approaches and further refinements in future project designs.

In light of the Government's and ADB's interest in promoting private sector development and regional trade, ADB's country gender strategy should also ensure that the needs and interests of small business owners and traders, especially women, are addressed in trade and business reforms and private sector development projects. The increasing restlessness and mobility of Lao young people, including young women, also suggests a need for greater investment in skill and language training and support for regional harmonization in skill certifications and labor standards. ADB's continuing support of large transport and hydropower projects also necessitates careful attention to the social risks associated with them.

### **2. Millennium Development Goal 3**

Goal 3 of the MDGs—to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women—provides a useful framework for ADB's gender-related work in Lao PDR. Although the target for this MDG focuses on eliminating gender disparities in education, the corresponding indicators are much broader:



- Indicator 9:** Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education
- Indicator 10:** Ratio of literate women to men (15–24 years of age)
- Indicator 11:** Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector
- Indicator 12:** Proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament

These indicators have their own flaws and limitations. However, they are useful in highlighting the multiple facets of gender equality and empowerment, and the way these elements (or lack of them) reinforce one another. For example, literacy is a prerequisite for accessing most private and public sector jobs and for participating in national and local government. The UN task force that is developing recommendations to countries for achieving MDG 3 has described gender equality and women's empowerment in these terms:

[W]omen must not only have *equal capabilities* (such as education and health) and *access to resources and opportunities* (such as land and employment), they must also have the *agency* to use these rights, capabilities, resources, and opportunities to make strategic choices and decisions (such as is provided through leadership opportunities and participation in political institutions).<sup>161</sup> (emphasis added)

### 3. Gender Strategy Framework

ADB's new country gender strategy for Lao PDR is built on Goal 3 of the MDGs. Under this framework, ADB will promote:

- *equal capabilities* in women, men, girls, and boys;
- *equal access to resources and opportunities*;
- *equality in decision making and rights*.

This gender strategy framework is consistent not only with the MDGs but also with the guarantees of equal treatment in the Lao Constitution and laws and with the gender strategies included in both the NGPES and the NRDS. It also can be linked to ADB's three core operational areas:

### 4. Priority Areas under the Country Gender Strategy

In operational terms, ADB will continue to promote *equal capabilities* through loans and grants for primary education, primary health care, water and sanitation, and other improvements in

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<sup>161</sup> Grown, Caren et al. 2003. *Promises to Keep: Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women*. Background Paper of the UN Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality. New York. In a later report, the task force presented a revised framework for achieving gender equality, consisting of three dimensions: (1) capabilities, (2) access to resources and opportunities, including political opportunities, and (3) security from violence and conflict. Birdsall, Nancy et al. 2004. *Millennium Project Task Force 3 Interim Report on Gender Equality*. New York.

basic services. With an ongoing focus on the northern provinces, these investments should continue to address the particular circumstances of ethnic minority women and girls. Reproductive health services, family planning, and STD awareness should be prioritized and promoted through culturally appropriate means.

#### **Country Gender Strategy**

- equal capabilities
- equal access to resources and opportunities
- equality in decision making and rights

#### **ADB's Core Operational Areas**

- inclusive social development
- pro-poor, sustainable, economic growth
- good governance

To promote *equal access to resources and opportunities*, ADB will continue to work with line agencies such as MAF to expand livelihood opportunities for rural women as well as men in crop diversification, livestock raising, aquaculture, agroprocessing, and handicraft production. Women's traditional land rights and access to community land must be protected. Projects promoting irrigation, other new technologies, and cash crops also need to be designed to ensure that women farmers benefit and that their subsistence activities are not undermined. In addition, ADB will support business reforms and financial services that benefit small businesses and traders especially women. ADB can also promote sound labor practices in factories and larger enterprises through its work with industry and professional associations as well as the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.

ADB can support *equality in decision making and rights* on several levels. In specific loan projects, various strategies should be used to support women's participation in decision-making bodies such as village committees and user groups. In ethnic minority communities, special confidence-building measures and woman-focused activities may be needed. Program and project loans should also support more gender and ethnic balance in the staffing of line ministries and local governments. ADB can support more gender-aware planning and programming through institutional support to specific line ministries or possibly to the new NCAW. There are also opportunities (i) to promote gender-equitable reforms in areas such as land registration and titling, business regulation, and financial services; (ii) to support more effective enforcement of the Labour Law and industry codes of conduct on labor conditions; and (iii) to support law and policy reforms to address domestic violence and human trafficking.

#### **D. Recommended Initiatives**

The current pipelines of loans and grants provide a good starting point for implementing the country gender strategy. (See Table 7 at the end of Chapter VI.) These and other possible interventions in ADB-supported sectors are discussed below.

## 1. Human Resource Development

**Education.** The Basic Education Development Project (2006 loan) provides an opportunity to build on the successful innovations in the current Basic Education (Girls) Project<sup>162</sup> and the Second Education Quality Improvement Project.<sup>163</sup> Among other innovations, these include scholarships and other incentives to increase the number of ethnic minority teachers in rural areas, the creation of more relevant course materials for primary schools, in-service training for teachers in multigrade schools, and food supplements to encourage girls to attend school. The new project could provide support to provincial education bureaus to develop locally relevant teaching materials, including materials on life skills, especially for ethnic minority areas. Measures also need to be taken to improve the compensation and other incentives for teachers in rural community schools. Other areas that ADB could support include “catch-up” courses to prepare young people—especially from ethnic minorities—for vocational and technical education programs. The results of the national literacy survey also point to the problem of “lost literacy,” especially for rural women. ADB and other agencies and NGOs could work with the Ministry of Education and other ministries to integrate functional literacy and numeracy training in village-based health, extension, and small business support programs targeting women. The proposed regional study on ICT-Enhanced Education Partnerships (2005 RETA) also presents an opportunity to pilot the use of ICT to support various teaching and training programs. It should focus in particular on affordable, user-friendly technologies and applications that are relevant to rural and ethnic minority communities including semi-literate women.

**Health.** The Health Sector Development Project (2006 standby loan) represents an opportunity to expand and refine successful approaches to primary health care that are being tested in the current Primary Health Care Expansion Project.<sup>164</sup> These include a modified training program for auxiliary nurses designed to expand the pool of ethnic minority health workers who can staff health centers in their communities; the use of mobile reproductive health teams in rural areas; and training of village health workers to manage drug revolving funds and provide basic health services in remote villages. Successful experiences from other health projects should also be incorporated. For example, radio and other media can be used to promote health education for men and young people as well as women especially in remote and ethnic minority areas. Steps also need to be taken to improve the compensation and other incentives for rural health workers. The GMS project on Communicable Disease Control in Border Areas (2005 loan) also presents an opportunity to pilot gender-sensitive approaches to the prevention, surveillance, and treatment of HIV/AIDS, other STDs, and other diseases especially in transit hubs and border areas. Preparation of the project should involve consultations with women from high-risk groups including migrant workers, factory workers, and workers in restaurants and clubs.

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<sup>162</sup> ADB. 1998. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Basic Education (Girls) Project*. Manila.

<sup>163</sup> ADB. 2001. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Second Education Quality Project Improvement*. Manila.

<sup>164</sup> ADB. 2000. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Primary Health Care Expansion Project*. Manila.

**Water Supply and Sanitation/Urban Development.** The Northern and Central Regions Water Supply and Urban Development Project (2005 loan) should benefit from the experiences in the current Vientiane Urban Infrastructure and Services Project<sup>165</sup> and Small Towns Development Sector Project<sup>166</sup> and incorporate lessons learned. Specifically, the two current projects include gender strategies that could be refined and adapted in the new project. These strategies recognize women's traditional role in securing water for household use. They provide for representation of women in village committees overseeing infrastructure improvement; for equal participation of women and men in community meetings and training; for flexibility in the financing of village improvements and user charges to accommodate the budgets of poor households; and for support for market vendors and microenterprises. Women's input can also be informative in the design of improvements to markets, bus stations, and other town infrastructure since women vendors are regular users of these facilities. In the 2005 loan project noted above, measures could also be included to improve the gender balance in the relevant urban development authorities.

The gender strategies from the projects noted above could also provide case studies for gender training of MCTPC and urban development authorities in other towns. This type of gender mainstreaming support to MCTPC and urban authorities could be funded from ADB's new multidonor GAD Cooperation Fund or other sources. (See also Chapter VI.D.5.)

## 2. Agriculture and Natural Resources Management

There are four loans currently in the pipeline for this sector and one loan recently approved. The design of the new Northern Community-Managed Irrigation Project<sup>167</sup> already reflects lessons learned from the Community-Managed Irrigation Project.<sup>168</sup> In particular, the project is expected to provide greater support to women to encourage their participation in water user associations, and the project will include community development activities for landless and poor farmers who would not otherwise benefit from the irrigation schemes. The project should also include measures to hire and train additional women and ethnic minorities as extension workers.

The Forest Plantation for Livelihood Improvement Project (2005 loan) has been designed in the shadow of the recently completed Industrial Tree Plantation Project.<sup>169</sup> There were a number of problems in the implementation of that project that should be addressed in the new project. However, the new project presents additional complications because it may be implemented in poor districts where there are large numbers of ethnic minorities. A commercial tree plantation, even on a small scale, poses a number of financial and other risks for poor households with no prior experience in tree planting, commercial transactions, or bank borrowing. A poor household also

<sup>165</sup> ADB. 2001. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Vientiane Urban Infrastructure and Service Project*. Manila.

<sup>166</sup> ADB. 2003. *RRP on Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Small Town Development Sector*. Manila

<sup>167</sup> ADB. 2004. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Northern Community-Managed Irrigation Project*. Manila.

<sup>168</sup> ADB. 1996. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Community-Managed Irrigation Project*. Manila.

<sup>169</sup> ADB. 1993. *RRP on Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Industrial Tree Plantation Project*. Manila.

cannot afford to mortgage its scarce land holding and risk becoming landless in the event that the tree plantation fails and the bank forecloses.

The Participatory Livestock Development Project (2006 loan) has the potential to provide substantial benefits to rural women who are primarily responsible for raising small livestock. The PPA and other studies have identified the need for more reliable vaccination programs for small livestock that could be tested in this project. The project would also benefit from a comprehensive gender strategy that could provide for women's participation in village-level decision making; in the training of village veterinary workers; in women's access to extension services; in credit and other inputs; and in hiring and training of more female and ethnic minority extension workers. The project can also learn from the experience of other livestock projects in Lao PDR including an EU-funded project and participatory research supported by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture. Technical assistance is also planned to build capacity in the Ministry of Agriculture to use more participatory approaches and to integrate gender-sensitivity training in its capacity building exercises.

The Nam Ou River Basin Development Project (2007 loan) is likely to be modeled on the current Nam Ngum River Basin Development Sector Project.<sup>170</sup> The Nam Ou project can also draw lessons from the gender action plan and ethnic groups' development plan in the Nam Ngum project to develop a gender action plan that is appropriate for the ethnic groups and environmental conditions in the Nam Ou River Basin. For example, the gender plan could provide for recruitment of women project staff and extension officers, for gender training for all project staff, for the formation of women's groups, for targets for women's participation in project activities, for tailoring of training programs to meet the needs and work schedules of women farmers, for gender-equitable land registration, and for women's participation in project evaluation.

The GMS project Flood Management and Mitigation (2007 loan) is also planned. This project should involve thorough gender analysis and consultations with women in flood-prone areas since floods have a direct impact on many women's livelihood activities including river gardens, aquaculture, paddy farming, and livestock rearing.

There are also a number of planned or recently approved technical assistance and regional technical assistance projects relating to agriculture and natural resources. Since Lao women are active in agriculture, gender considerations should generally be included. For example, the study on gender inequality in access to natural resources in certain ethnic minority areas directly addresses gender issues, and assistance on marketing organic products of ethnic minority groups is directly related to women's organic gardening activities. A planned regional study on sustainable livelihood protection and natural resource management also should include careful analysis of gender and ethnicity issues in light of rural women's central role in subsistence farming and collection of NTFPs.

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<sup>170</sup> ADB. 2002. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Nam Ngum River Basin Development Sector Project*. Manila.

In light of its substantial support to the Lao agriculture sector, ADB should also consider assisting MAF to develop an overall gender strategy and program for the agriculture sector. This sector strategy could draw on the extensive gender mainstreaming resources developed in the Lao-Swedish Forestry Programme and other projects. Other external agencies such as FAO and SIDA might also be involved. A sector-wide approach to gender mainstreaming could also provide a model for other line ministries and for the NCAW. A sector-wide gender strategy and program could address recurring issues such as the gender and ethnic balance in provincial and district agriculture offices, especially among extension workers; gender training of MAF staff; and gender-sensitive approaches to planning, project design, and project monitoring. ADB is currently supporting similar exercises in both Cambodia and Viet Nam. Funding could be sought from ADB's new GAD Cooperation Fund or from other sources.

A more specific area that could benefit from gender mainstreaming is the land/forest allocation program. As discussed in Chapters III.C and IV.B, gender awareness activities have played an important role in the Land Titling Project funded by the World Bank in order to ensure that ethnic Lao women do not lose their traditional rights to land as a result of land titling. No comparable awareness-raising activities are included in the process of allocating rural land although similar risks exist there as well. Some commentators have recently recommended that the land/forest allocation program adopt gender awareness activities and gender training similar to those developed for the Land Titling Project. ADB could support such a program through stand-alone technical assistance or assistance linked to the Forest Plantation for Livelihood Improvement Project (2005 loan).

### **3. Private Sector Development**

The 2002 CSP and more recently the GMS RCSP confirm ADB's interest in promoting markets and private sector businesses in Lao PDR. Two loans in the current pipeline directly support private sector activities: the Rural Finance Development Project (2005 loan) and the SME Development Project (2006 loan). The Rural Finance Development Project already has been classified with a GAD theme which reflects the dominant role of rural women as agroprocessors, handicraft producers, shop owners, and small-scale traders. Related technical assistance is also proposed to strengthen the capacity of local LWU offices to act as social intermediaries for microfinance institutions. In this role, local LWU staff would help rural women to organize and access the financial services provided through the Rural Finance Development Project. Credit unions are one possible model that will be piloted through the loan. This model has the advantage of providing both credit and savings.

Recent surveys in Lao PDR have identified savings as more immediately useful to poor women who are generally reluctant to borrow for business purposes and other non-emergencies. The capacity-building grant project is an important complement to the loan because it highlights the need for social mobilization activities to extend financial services to poor and ethnic minority women. Gender concerns should also be reflected in the design and implementation of the loan itself including the hiring and training of credit union staff, the operating procedures, the types of financial products offered, and outreach activities.

The SME Development Project offers many opportunities for addressing the needs and constraints of small business owners especially women. As noted in Chapter III.C, the majority of registered businesses in Lao PDR are owned and operated by women. The vast majority of these—and all other registered businesses—are small. However, the interests of small businesses often are not adequately considered when business laws and regulations are revised. State-owned enterprises and other large businesses have a greater voice in the law reform process and can more easily absorb the costs of regulatory compliance (or negotiate more favorable treatment from regulators). Small business owners, especially women, are also not well represented in the Lao Chamber of Commerce and industry groups. It would therefore be advisable for the project to include a specific strategy to address the needs of small business owners, especially women. Possible measures include (i) consultations with woman business owners in a sampling of provinces; (ii) capacity building for the Vientiane Women's Business Association; (iii) support for establishing women's business associations in other urban centers or for improving gender balance and gender awareness within the Chamber of Commerce and industry groups; (iv) analysis of proposed changes in business, tax, and trade regulations from a small business and gender perspective; (v) development of codes of conduct on labor conditions for selected industry groups; and (vi) development of accessible handbooks and training materials on small business management. The project could also support recommendations from the recent GRID/ILO study of gender issues in micro and small businesses (discussed in Chapter III.C.2). The project should coordinate with other externally funded projects to support small businesses and woman entrepreneurs. Training, business services, and other activities under the project should also include targets for participation of women and ethnic minorities.

Some technical assistance in the pipeline is also relevant to women business owners. Marketing Support for the Organic Produce of Ethnic Minorities will support the establishment of handicraft trade groups within ethnic minority villages and will assist them in accessing fair trade markets for their agricultural and handicraft products. Since most of these products are made by women, the project can potentially increase ethnic minority women's income and status. However, it will be important to work with village leaders to ensure that women artisans participate in the trade groups (or separate women's groups) and receive appropriate training and other support. (Otherwise, male village members may attempt to control the project.) In some ethnic minority villages, women may need additional orientation and support because of their limited literacy and numeracy skills and lack of experience in dealing directly with outsiders.

The proposed technical assistance project—Integrating the Poor in Regional Trade through Standard-Setting for Private Sector Development Phase II should also yield benefits to women. In its first phase, the project helped to develop a national standard for the production of Lao silk that is woven primarily by women in several provinces. The objective of a national standard is to improve the quality of Lao silk for export and thereby raise its value and increase the incomes of Lao weavers and others in the production and marketing chain. Phase II will provide capacity building to Lao silk producers to understand and follow the standard and will support partnerships between silk producing communities and cooperatives which finish and market the silk products. Phase II will also expand the scope of assistance into several additional provinces and will develop

a methodology to assess the poverty impact of implementing the new standard. The methodology should provide for collecting and analyzing data disaggregated by gender in order to verify the gender-related impacts as well.

The NRDS includes a broad framework for promoting private sector development and foreign investment in the northern region of Lao PDR. The NRDS gender strategy identifies several possible measures to ensure that these initiatives are beneficial both to women business owners and women workers. These recommendations are also relevant to ADB's activities. Several of the suggestions related to small business owners are already mentioned above. Through its private sector operations, ADB could also require private sector businesses that are receiving equity or debt financing from ADB (or from an ADB-supported regional fund such as the Mekong Project Development Facility) to promote gender and ethnic balance in their hiring, in-house training, and promotions in addition to meeting international standards of social and environmental responsibility. Finally, as a follow-up to its recent technical assistance on social protection issues and options, ADB could support the development of proposals for strengthening the labor protections and social security schemes for formal sector workers and for extending these protections to informal sector workers. These proposals should focus in particular on workers in the volatile garment sector who are mainly young women from rural areas. ADB should coordinate closely with ILO which is already working with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare on labor and social protection issues.

#### **4. Infrastructure**

The RCSP for the GMS reaffirms ADB's commitment to infrastructure development to promote subregional trade in goods and services. The NRDS provides blueprints for further development of the road networks and electricity grid in the northern region of Lao PDR. The benefits of improved infrastructure in rural areas are well recognized. However, the Environment and Social Program for Lao PDR,<sup>171</sup> approved in late 2001, also acknowledges that road and hydropower projects entail substantial environmental and social risks and that previous hydropower projects in Lao PDR in particular seriously underestimated these risks and required substantial remedial action. Moreover, the groups most affected by rural road and hydropower projects in Lao PDR tend to be ethnic minority communities in remote areas that have limited capacity to cope with external shocks. The Environment and Social Program therefore is supporting improvements in the regulatory frameworks for environmental management and social safeguards in the transport and energy sectors and improvements in compliance and enforcement. Experience has also shown that infrastructure projects can affect women and men differently, for example, in their impacts on livelihood activities and health. Therefore, both the NGPES and NRDS gender strategies recommend measures to address these differences including consultations with women's and men's groups during the design phase of a project and gender analysis of the likely benefits and impacts of the project.

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<sup>171</sup> ADB. 2001. *RRP on Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Environmental and Social Program*. Manila.



The new Roads for Rural Development Project<sup>172</sup> will improve roads in Attapeu, Borikhamxay, Xayabury and Vientiane provinces. The project includes a comprehensive social action plan modeled on the one in the Northern Economic Corridor Project,<sup>173</sup> to address the various social risks associated with the project. Because some of the road improvements will extend into ethnic minority areas, specific community development plans for these areas have been prepared under the social action plan to address the particular vulnerabilities of ethnic minority settlements. One of these subplans includes measures to help villages manage NTFP harvesting because of the perceived risk of exploitation of these resources by outsiders. Other components of the social action plan include (i) a nonformal education program for ethnic minority villages with a special emphasis on girls and women; (ii) provisions to extend land use rights or land titles to households along the road corridors to protect them from “land grabbing” by outsiders; (iii) a community road safety awareness program; (iv) a detailed program on awareness and prevention of HIV/AIDS, other STDs, and drug use; and (v) a detailed program on awareness and prevention of trafficking of women and children. Contractors are also required to pay equal wages to women and men for equivalent work and to not use child labor.

In general, ADB-financed road projects should provide opportunities for women to participate on equal terms in local employment generated by the project and in community decision making related to resettlement, road construction, maintenance, and improvements in facilities such as bus terminals and markets. In ethnic minority areas, additional effort may be needed to consult with ethnic minority women and involve them in project activities. The Roads for Rural Development Project and Northern Economic Corridor Project provide models for addressing gender, ethnicity, and other social issues in future road projects. Recent experience in Lao road projects also confirms the need for ongoing monitoring of resettlement plans and mitigation measures—ideally by an independent expert or NGO—to ensure that the negative impacts of the project are minimized and addressed.

Energy projects raise different social and gender issues depending on the nature of the project. Electrification projects such as the Northern Area Rural Power Distribution Project<sup>174</sup> approved in late 2003 raise issues related to community participation and resettlement. Where the electricity grid is being extended into poor areas, connection charges and tariff rates may also need to be adjusted in order to encourage poor households to connect to the grid. Rural women should be consulted about the potential charges and rates for electricity connection since in many cases they control the household finances and earn most of the cash income that would be used to pay the electricity charges.

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<sup>172</sup> ADB. 2004. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Roads for Rural Development Project*. Manila.

<sup>173</sup> ADB. 2002. *RRP on Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Northern Economic Corridor Project*. Manila.

<sup>174</sup> ADB. 2003. *RRP on a Proposed Loan to Lao PDR for the Northern Area Rural Power Distribution Project*. Manila.

Large hydropower projects introduce dramatic changes in the catchment and dam reservoir areas as well as in the downstream environment. In Lao PDR, these projects are generally located in remote areas where the local ethnic minority populations are highly dependent on forest and water resources. Thorough environmental and social assessments therefore are required to identify the likely impacts of the project and to design suitable mitigation measures. Ethnographic studies are often needed because the local population may include several small ethnic groups that are less well known and are also more vulnerable to change. The preparation of the Nam Theun 2 Hydropower Project (2005 loan) has already involved extensive environmental and social studies, and ADB is currently undertaking its own assessments. Because of the scale of the project and the vulnerabilities of ethnic groups in the project area, particular attention is being paid to the risks of STDs and human trafficking associated with the construction of project roads into remote areas and with the influx of large construction crews. Gender specialists have also been engaged to ensure that the project addresses the particular needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls in the catchment, reservoir and downstream areas. In addition to social and health risks, the gender specialists are considering the possible impact on women's farming, foraging, river gardening, and fishing. The mitigation plans for the Nam Theun 2 project also will address possible downstream impacts, for example, on water quality, river gardens, and the fish stocks that provide a vital source of protein to poor households.

## **5. Governance**

### **a. Current Governance Support**

In the area of governance, ADB has focused recently on capacity building of the National Audit Office and on financial management and accounting functions. Assistance has also been provided to the NSC to strengthen its capacity for participatory poverty monitoring. Through the Environment and Social Program loan, ADB is supporting the development of guidelines for public consultations and participation in the monitoring of large infrastructure projects. Through the NRDS, ADB is also assisting CPC in piloting a regional planning exercise with substantial input from provincial governments.

### **b. Governance Pipeline**

ADB's governance pipeline includes technical assistance to support further work on poverty monitoring and evaluation, more efficient delivery of public services, and urban governance and financial management. The new assistance for poverty monitoring should continue the work begun A to develop gender-related indicators and gender-sensitive approaches to participatory monitoring. Assistance on service delivery and urban governance could incorporate tools and training for gender-aware planning and budgeting.

Through policy dialogue and loan projects in key sectors such as education, health, and agriculture, ADB could make recommendations to the Government to improve salaries and benefits for government employees especially at the provincial and district levels. ADB could also use these channels to encourage the Government to set clear targets for improving the gender and ethnic

balance in the civil services especially at the provincial and district levels and among teachers, health professionals, and extension agents.

### **c. NRDS Implementation**

The NRDS proposes that the Government and northern provincial governments establish an institutional mechanism to facilitate regional cooperation and implementation of the sector strategies. This mechanism could take the form of a high-level coordinating committee and sector working groups and might also involve the establishment of a regional think tank or other institution. It is not yet clear how ADB will support the NRDS process going forward; however, it would be desirable to create a mechanism to support implementation of the gender strategy. For example, a gender-working group could be established including representatives from CPC, line ministries, provincial governments, and the LWU. Any regional think tank or other institution set up to support the NRDS could also include gender specialists as full-time staff or advisors.

The gender strategy in the NRDS recommends establishing a development apprenticeship program for young men and women from poor rural areas especially ethnic minority areas. The goal of such a program would be to provide them on-the-job training and employment while also expanding the pool of ethnic language speakers who have experience in community development. This proposal is based on a successful experiment in the Sekong Indigenous People's Development Program supported by UNDP. It also echoes an earlier proposal included in the country briefing paper on women to establish internships for young Lao women in government offices, businesses, and other organizations. ADB might also consider piloting an internship program linked to one of its loan projects in the northern region such as the Northern Community-Managed Irrigation Project, the Participatory Livestock Project, or the Nam Ou River Basin Development Project. Through the internship program, young ethnic minority women and men from the project area could be recruited to work as community liaisons, for example, to assist with the formation of user groups and other social mobilization activities. Female interns could be especially helpful in establishing a rapport with ethnic minority women and facilitating their involvement in project activities. Funding for the pilot internship program might be obtained from the Poverty Reduction Cooperation Fund, the GAD Cooperation Fund, or general technical assistance funds.

### **d. Gender Mainstreaming Support**

The new NCAW is likely to need substantial technical and institutional support in the area of gender mainstreaming. ADB could provide technical assistance to the NCAW itself to follow up on its assistance to the LWU in developing guidelines for a national gender plan of action. Alternatively, as discussed above, ADB could assist a particular line agency such as MAF or MCTPC in developing a gender mainstreaming strategy for a key sector. Even more specifically, ADB could support gender mainstreaming in a particular program such as the land allocation program currently administered by MAF, or it could support capacity building for MCTPC and urban development authorities. These activities could be funded from the GAD Cooperation Fund, the Governance Fund, or other sources. (In the case of MCTPC and urban development authorities,

ADB-supported projects such as the Vientiane Urban Infrastructure and Services Project could be used as case studies for gender training purposes.)

#### **e. Law and Policy Reform**

Finally, there are a number of opportunities for ADB to support gender-equitable law and policy reform and legal empowerment. Support for gender mainstreaming in the land allocation program mentioned in the previous paragraph would probably entail changes in rural land registers and related forms and certificates. As discussed earlier, technical assistance is being provided to study gender inequality in access to land and other natural resources in ethnic minority areas. This study will examine the tensions between the land, inheritance and property laws on the one hand and traditional land and inheritance practices on the other. There is also a recommendation above to carry out a gender analysis of proposed reforms in business, tax, and trade regulations under the SME Development Project.

There is limited awareness on gender equality and women's rights in the Ministry of Justice and the legal profession and in the Lao population generally. After the CEDAW expert committee has examined Lao PDR's report on its implementation of the Convention, there may be new opportunities for external agencies to support the NCAW in raising awareness about CEDAW and the expert committee's findings and recommendations. UNIFEM has traditionally taken the lead in promoting general awareness of CEDAW. UNDP and some bilateral agencies have also supported CEDAW awareness through their governance programs. ADB should identify opportunities to incorporate the CEDAW committee's findings and recommendations in its overall country program and in specific projects.

### **6. Regional Cooperation**

The RCSP for the GMS outlines a broad program for regional cooperation in which ADB would provide a combination of loans and technical assistance in four areas: (i) infrastructure, cross-border facilitation, and tourism; (ii) private sector development; (iii) human development (including human capital development and responses to health and social risks from communicable diseases and human trafficking); and (iv) environmental and shared resource management. The RCSP pipeline includes several loans and a large number of proposals for regional technical assistance and other nonlending products.

Three of these GMS loans have been discussed in earlier chapters (Nam Theun 2 Hydropower Development, Communicable Disease Control in Border Areas and Flood Management and Mitigation). A fourth loan is for the Pro-Poor Tourism Development Project (2006 standby loan) and is intended to build on the Mekong Tourism Development Project<sup>175</sup> approved in late 2002. This tourism project includes a detailed gender strategy to ensure that women can participate in and benefit equitably from community-based tourism activities. The

<sup>175</sup> ADB. 2002. *RRP on Proposed Loans to the Kingdom of Cambodia, Lao PDR and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam for the Greater Mekong Subregion: Mekong Tourism Development Project*. Manila.

gender strategy provides for gender balance in training and membership in ecotourism associations, support for village-based women's groups, and community awareness programs on STD risks. This gender strategy provides a good starting point for the follow-up tourism project that should also reflect lessons learned in the earlier project. For all GMS loans including those already being implemented, it will be important to monitor gender-related results and impacts. This could be done through the inclusion of gender-related indicators in the monitoring system for individual GMS projects or through the engagement of independent monitors for these projects.

Several recently approved and proposed regional technical assistance studies for the GMS directly or indirectly address gender issues, especially those relating to human development. These include studies on Promoting Safe Migration for Women and Preventing Trafficking of Girls and Women, Vulnerability and Risk Mitigation among Ethnic Minorities in the GMS through Information Management, and Sustainable Livelihoods Protection and Natural Resource Management. There are also opportunities to integrate gender concerns in regional studies related to agriculture, trade facilitation, and tourism in light of the important roles of women in agriculture, handicraft production for export, and small-scale trade and the gender-related opportunities and risks of tourism development. (See Table 7 at the end of this chapter.)

ADB could also play an effective role in promoting the development of GMS work visas and reciprocal social protection schemes, in order to improve opportunities and conditions for migrant workers. This would be particularly beneficial to Lao workers in Thailand who now have very limited protection. Now that Lao PDR has established the NCAW, there are also greater opportunities for cooperation and exchange with the other national focal agencies promoting gender equality in the GMS. For example, the GAD Cooperation Fund could be tapped to support research, workshops, and exchange visits involving staff from the national women's machineries. Subregional cooperation on gender equality issues could also be strengthened by establishing a GMS working group on the issue including representatives from finance, planning, and line ministries as well as the national women's machineries.

## **E. Operational Approaches**

The country briefing paper on women outlined several steps to incorporate gender sensitivity in loan projects and other interventions. These include (i) gender impact assessments during the project design phase and establishment of a gender baseline at the start of the project; (ii) gender sensitivity training for both foreign and Lao staff and Government counterparts; (iii) minimum targets for male/female participation in training and other project activities; (iv) collection of data disaggregated by gender; (v) consultations with women affected or potentially affected by project activities; (vi) assistance from domestic women consultants who speak the local language; and (vii) independent monitoring of gender impacts of projects.

These operational approaches are still valid and should be followed under the new country gender strategy. In addition, ADB's Policy on Gender and Development now requires ADB to mainstream gender concerns in all of its operational activities including macroeconomic work, economic/thematic/sector studies and policy dialogue as well as in loans and technical assistance.

For example, ADB recently supported the inclusion of gender strategies in both the NGPES and the NRDS. ADB can provide similar support in future government planning and budget exercises.

In recent years, it has also become more common for loan projects to include a gender strategy or plan that brings together all of the measures intended to ensure that women benefit from the project activities. A comprehensive gender strategy or plan supported by an appropriate covenant in the project loan agreement can also facilitate monitoring of the gender provisions in the project. Recent mid-term assessments of ongoing loan projects in other countries have highlighted the need for continuous monitoring to ensure that project gender strategies and plans are followed and refined as needed—during project implementation. This requires ongoing attention by resident mission staff and review missions from headquarters.

As noted earlier, there is a gender focal point but no dedicated gender specialist in LRM. There is therefore the risk that gender-sensitive provisions in some loan projects may not be monitored regularly, and necessary adjustments in these provisions may not be made. One possible solution would be for MKRD or LRM to engage a local gender specialist to periodically monitor and report on implementation of gender strategies in selected projects. Since several recent ADB loans to Lao PDR incorporate gender strategies or plans, it would also be extremely useful to commission a special assessment of the effectiveness of these gender strategies in the related projects. The local gender specialist and special assessment could be funded out of the GAD Cooperation Fund or from other sources. Refresher training on gender analysis and gender-sensitive project design, implementation, and monitoring could also be provided to project implementation officers in LRM.

ADB is paying increasing attention to results including results-based approaches to country and regional programming. Therefore, it is appropriate to consider the gender-related results that ADB should seek to achieve through its new CSP for Lao PDR (to be prepared in 2005). There are several relevant sources for targets and indicators of gender-awareness, gender-inclusive processes, improvement in gender equity, and women's empowerment in Lao PDR. These include national targets related to the MDGs, the Government's commitments under CEDAW and other treaties, and components of the NGPES and NRDS gender strategies, many of which overlap. This gender strategy report refers to all of these sources. (For example, the NGPES gender strategy is summarized in Box 2 at the end of Chapter III.A. Each subheading of Chapter III also refers to the relevant national MDG targets, to parts of the NGPES and NRDS gender strategies, and to related CEDAW commitments for the sector.) This report therefore can be a resource for developing gender-related results to include in the new Lao CSP as well as for preparing an overall gender strategy to include in the CSP.

**Table 7: ADB ASSISTANCE PIPELINE**

Table 7A: Indicative Lending Products (2004-2007)\*

<b>Project/Program</b>	<b>Poverty Classif.</b>	<b>Thematic Priority</b>	<b>Sector</b>	<b>Division</b>	<b>Loan Amount (\$million)</b>	<b>Gender Issues and Gender-Inclusive Approaches</b> (in addition to general “good practices”, including gender analysis, consultations with LWU and women’s groups, gender-related targets and indicators, and provision for gender specialist to assist with project implementation)
<i>2004 (Firm Loans)</i>						
Northern Community-Managed Irrigation	CPI	ECO/ ENV	Agric./ Nat. Res.	MKAE	10.0	Project gender plan provides for male/female community-level organizers in each village; direct engagement of district LWU to facilitate women’s involvement in project activities; targets for recruitment of female extension and training staff; targets women’s participation in water user groups and extension activities; monitoring of gender-disaggregated indicators.
Roads for Rural Dev’t	CPI	ECO	Transport/ Commun.	MKID	17.7	Social action plan includes nonformal education program for ethnic minority villages (with special emphasis on girls and women); NTFP management plan; provisions for secure land tenure to prevent “land-grabbing” by outsiders; road safety awareness program; and detailed programs on awareness/prevention of HIV/AIDS and other STDs, drug use, and trafficking of women and children. Contractors are required to pay equal wages to women/men for equivalent work, and to not use child labor.
<i>2005 (Firm Loans)</i>						
Forest Plantation for Livelihood Improvement	PI	ECO/ ENV	Agric./ Nat. Res.	MKAE	10.0	Consult with women in project area about their livelihood activities, interest in participating in plantation activities, land rights, access to extension and credit; hire/train additional female extension staff in project districts; include targets for women’s access to extension, credit and other project inputs; provide awareness-raising on land rights and credit risks; include measures to address needs of poor and landless in project area.

Northern & Central Regions Water Supply & Urban Dev't, Phase 1	PI	ISD/ECO	WSS & Waste Mg't	MKSS	10.0	Consult with women in project area on uses of water, options for WSS construction/maintenance, and interest in participating in construction supervision and/or maintenance; consult with women vendors and LWU representatives on design of improvements to markets, bus stations and other basic infrastructure; include measures to encourage women's participation in project activities (e.g., representation in project committees and user groups, targets for women's participation in training, coordination with LWU and women's groups on public hygiene programs); include targets for hiring/training female staff in district Nam Saat (or relevant urban development authorities); allow flexibility in contributions to village improvements and user charges to accommodate budgets of poor households.
GMS: Nam Theun 2 Hydropower Dev't	Other	ECO/RC	Subreg./ Energy	MKID	20.0 (excluding private sector loan and political risk guarantee)	Consult with women from different ethnic minority groups in project area (both upstream and downstream) on resettlement plans and possible disruption of their farming/foraging/fishing/river gardening activities; address women's needs/concerns in resettlement and mitigation plans, and provide for women's involvement in implementation of these plans; include nonformal education, health care improvements and alternative livelihood activities in mitigation plans; include budgeted programs on awareness/prevention of HIV/AIDS and other STDs, and human trafficking. [A gender assessment has been carried out, and a gender strategy will be developed as part of project preparation, to address these concerns.]



GMS: Communicable Disease Control in Border Areas	PI	ISD/GG/R C	Subreg./ Health/ Nutrition/ Soc. Prot.	MKSS	6.0	Consult women (including LWU representatives, village health workers, and women from high-risk groups) on awareness and attitudes toward HIV/AIDS and other STDs; hire/train female health specialists (especially from ethnic minority groups); pilot gender-sensitive approaches to prevention, surveillance and treatment of HIV/AIDS and other STDs, especially in transit hubs and border areas.
Rural Finance Sector Dev't	PI	ECO/GA D/ PSD	Finance	MKGF	10.0	Consult with women business owners/traders on their savings and credit needs, and factors discouraging them from accessing financial institutions; develop financial products and service delivery mechanisms that respond to these needs/constraints; include targets for women staff in microfinance institutions and as women borrowers/savers; coordinate with LWU and NGOs on social mobilization and provision of business training to women borrowers/savers (through related TA involving LWU – see Table 2).
<i>2005 (Standby)</i>						
GMS: Info. & Communication Technology, Phase 1	Other	ECO/RC/ PSD	Subreg./ Transport/ Commun.	MKID	20.0	Identify opportunities for women to benefit from ICT (e.g., agricultural extension, market information, distance learning, telemedicine); identify user-friendly technologies; develop gender-sensitive strategies for ICT training; include targets for women's participation in ICT training.
<i>2006 (Firm Loans)</i>						
Participatory Livestock Dev't	CPI	ECO/EN V	Agric./ Nat. Res.	MKAE	10.0	Consult with women livestock raisers on their needs for extension, vaccination programs, credit and market information; hire/train female livestock specialists in project districts; include measures to encourage women's participation in project activities (e.g., training of women as village veterinary workers, targets for women's participation in extension, or women-only extension programs; targets for women's access to credit and other inputs).

Basic Education Dev't	PI	ISD/PSD	Educ.	MKSS	15.0	Build on gender-inclusive approaches in Basic Education (Girls) Project: include scholarships and other incentives to increase number of ethnic minority teachers in rural area; create more locally relevant course materials for primary schools; provide in-service training for teachers in multigrade schools, and food supplements to encourage girls to attend school; pilot teaching in local languages in early grades; include girls' restrooms and clean water supply in new school construction.
SME Development	NC	PSD	Industry/Trade	MKGF	10.0	Consult women business owners on their business needs and constraints (e.g., registration, tax and trade rules, access to credit, business services and market information); strengthen capacity of women's business associations and networks; increase women's representation in national/provincial chambers of commerce; analyze proposed changes in business/tax/trade rules from a small-business and gender perspective; develop user-friendly handbooks and training materials on small business management; develop codes of conduct on labor conditions for selected industry groups; include targets for women's participation in training, business services and other project activities.
<i>2006 (Standby)</i>						
Health Sector Dev't	PI	PSD/ISD	Health/ Nutrition/ Soc. Prot.	MKSS	15.0	Build on successful approaches to primary health care in Primary Health Care Expansion Project: provide accelerated training for auxiliary nurses and other health workers, especially ethnic minority women; use mobile reproductive health teams to reach women in remote areas; train village health workers to manage drug revolving funds and provide basic health services in remote villages; improve compensation/benefits for health workers in rural areas; use radio and other media to promote health awareness to youth and men.

Northern & Central Regions Water Sanitation & Urban Dev't, Phase 2	PI	ISD/ECO	WSS & Waste Mg't	MKSS	15.0	See Phase 1 above.
GMS: Pro-Poor Tourism Dev't	PI	RC	Subreg./ Multisector	MKSS	10.0	Build on gender-inclusive approaches in Mekong Tourism Development Project: consult with women in project area on their interest in participating in tourism-related activities and needs for training/other support; ensure gender balance in membership and training of ecotourism and cultural tourism associations; support formation of women's groups to engage in village-based tourism activities and provide them with training/other support, as needed; provide community awareness programs on HIV/AIDS and other STD risks and treatment.
<i>2007 (Firm Loans)</i>						
Nam Ou River Basin Dev't	CPI	ECO	Agric./ Nat. Res.	MKAE	15.0	Build on gender action plan and ethnic groups' development plan in Nam Ngum River Basin Development Sector Project: hire/train women project and extension staff; provide gender training for all project staff; support formation of women's groups and set targets for women's participation in project activities; tailor training programs to meet needs/schedules of women farmers; ensure gender equity in land allocation and registration; include women in project monitoring.
GMS: Flood Mg't & Mitigation	Other	ENV/RC	Subreg./ Agric./ Nat. Res.	MKAE	10.0	Consult women in flood-prone areas about impact of flooding on their livelihood activities (including paddy farming, river gardens, aquaculture and trading) and access to markets and basic services; consult women on options for flood mitigation and their interest in participating in project activities; include measures to encourage women's involvement in community decision-making, supervision of construction and maintenance.

Public Admin. Reform Program	Other	GG	Multisector	MKGF	10.0	Analyze gender composition of public service and develop strategies to recruit and promote more women from different ethnic groups in public service; analyze proposed reforms in public administration, public expenditure management and public service delivery from a gender perspective, and modify reform proposals to avoid any negative gender impacts and promote gender equity in public sector activities.
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\*This indicative pipeline is subject to change.

Table 7B: Indicative Nonlending Products (2004-2007)\*

Name	Sector	Division	Type	Source	Amount (\$'000)	<b>Gender Issues and Gender-Inclusive Approaches</b> (in addition to general “good practices” such as gender analysis and consultation with LWU and women’s groups during TA fact-finding; inclusion of gender specialist in TA consulting team; and gender-inclusive activities and outputs in consultants’ terms of reference)
<i>2004</i>						
Marketing Support for Organic Produce of Ethnic Minorities	Agric./ Nat. Res.	MKAE	ADTA	PRF	600.0	Consult with women farmers, gardeners and agroprocessors on their marketing needs and constraints; ensure gender and ethnic balance in any extension/training activities; tailor TA recommendations to address needs of women agriculturalists.
Inst. Strengthening for Poverty Monitoring & Evaluation	Law/ Pub. Sector Mg’t	MKOC	ADTA	TASF	400.0	Improve gender disaggregation of poverty statistics; refine gender-sensitive indicators of non-income poverty; improve gender-sensitivity of survey and rapid appraisal methods; train female researchers (especially from ethnic minority groups).
Integrating the Poor in Regional Trade (Ph. 2)	Industry/ Trade	MKGF	ADTA	PRF	700.0	Include women handicraft producers and agroprocessors in consultations on development of product standards and related training; address marketing and other constraints on women entrepreneurs.
Gender Inequality in Women’s Access to Land, Forests & Water	Agric./ Nat. Res.	MKAE	ADTA	PRF	250.0	TA directly addresses gender issues.
Capacity Building for Smallholder Livestock Systems	Agric./ Nat. Res.	MKAE	ADTA	PRF	550.0	See Participatory Livestock Development Project (Table 1).

Poverty Reduction Through Land Tenure Consolidation, Participatory Natural Resources Management and Local Community Skill Building	Agric./ Nat. Res.	MKID	ADTA	PRF	850.0	Consult with women in Nam Ha watershed area on their livelihood activities and interest in participating in project activities; facilitate women's participation in village decision-making, extension/training and other activities; provide literacy/numeracy training for women (and other support, if needed); monitor gender-related impacts of new livelihood activities (including changes in gender division of labor and time use).
GMS: Promoting Safe Migration for Women & Preventing Trafficking of Girls and Women	Subreg./ Agric./ Nat. Res.	MKAE	RETA	PRF	700.0	TA directly addresses gender issues.
GMS: Reviewing Poverty Impact of Regional Economic Integration in GMS	Subreg./ Agric./ Nat. Res.	MKAE	RETA	NPRS	750.0	Analyze direct and indirect impacts of regional integration on women and girls, particularly in border areas (including impacts on women farmers/gardeners, agroprocessors, handicraft producers, garment workers, sex workers and migrants); also analyze gender/social impact of increasing population density and mobility in border towns.
GMS: Capacity Building for Promoting Agric. Dev't	Subreg./ Agric./ Nat. Res.	MKAE	RETA	TASF	800.0	Identify needs of women farmers, gardeners, fisherfolk and agroprocessors; develop strategy for improving delivery of extension and other support services to these groups; ensure gender and ethnic balance in any farm-level research, training, exchanges and workshops.
GMS: ADB-MRC Cooperation Program	Subreg./ Agric./ Nat. Res.	MKAE	RETA	TASF	500.0	Support and extend MRC's gender mainstreaming approach: identify and address gender concerns in research, capacity building and project proposals; ensure gender and ethnic balance in consultations, training and workshops.

GMS: Tourism Sector Strategy Study	Subreg./ Multi sector	MKSS	RETA	TASF	800.0	Analyze opportunities and risks of tourism development for women and girls, especially in ethnic minority areas and remote communities; develop guidelines for equitable community-based tourism, awareness-raising programs on HIV/AIDS and human trafficking risks; ensure gender and ethnic balance in any training or workshops.
GMS: Vulnerability and Risk Mitigation among Ethnic Minorities in the GMS through Info. Mg't	Subreg./ Educ.	MKSS	RETA	NPRS	700.0	Identify education/literacy needs of women and girls in various ethnic groups; develop gender-sensitive approaches to ethnographic research, training of traditional leaders and healers, and formal/nonformal education.
GMS: Mekong Basin Nat. Res. Initiative	Subreg./ Other	MKOC	RETA	TASF	150.0	Consider women's roles in agriculture, collection of water, fuelwood and NTFPs, preservation/use of indigenous knowledge, and natural resource management (NRM); include this information in NRM database and identify related research gaps.
2005						
Public Services Delivery Efficiency	Law/ Pub. Sector Mg't	MKGF	ADTA	TASF	500.0	Analyze gender composition of relevant ministries and provincial/district offices (including teachers, health workers and extension workers), and develop strategies for recruiting/retaining more women staff from different ethnic groups, especially at provincial and district levels; identify barriers to effective service delivery, especially to ethnic minority women and girls, and develop strategies to address these gaps.
Capacity Building for Gender Mainstreaming	Law/ Pub. Sector Mg't	MKOC	ADTA	TBD	400.0	TA directly addresses gender issues.

Promoting LWU Capacity to Organize Poor Rural Women for Viable Microfinance Services	Law/ Public Sector Mg't	MKGF	ADTA	PRF	300.0	TA directly addresses gender issues.
Economic Integration & Market-based Dev't	Other	MKOC	ADTA	TASF	600.0	Following recommendations in NRDS gender strategy, identify opportunities to improve market access for small producers and traders, especially women; analyze any proposed changes in trade and tax regulations from a gender and small-business perspective; provide market and storage facilities for small-scale traders at border crossings and in duty-free zones.
Institutional Strengthening for Rural Finance	Finance	MKGF	ADTA	TASF Denmark	400.0 300.0	Consult with small-business owners (especially women) on their savings and credit needs and constraints; analyze gender and ethnic composition of APB and pilot credit unions, and recommend strategy for improving gender/ethnic balance; tailor TA recommendations to meet financial needs of women entrepreneurs. See also Rural Finance Sector Dev't Project (Table 1).
Implementing Framework for Rural & Microfinance	Finance	MKGF	ADTA	TBD	150.0	Same.
GMS: Expansion of Subreg. Coop. in Agric. Sector	Subreg./ Agric./ Nat. Res.	MKAE	RETA	TASF	500.0	Identify market opportunities for small-scale farmers, gardeners and agroprocessors; develop gender-sensitive strategies to provide extension, marketing and other support; ensure gender and ethnic balance in extension, training, exchanges and workshops.
GMS: Reg. Business Initiative for Rural Dev't	Subreg./ Agric./ Nat. Res.	MKAE	RETA	TASF	200.0	In partnering business enterprises with rural villages, facilitate women's participation in any training/skills transfer related to production techniques, quality control, financing and marketing; ensure that women with home-based businesses retain control of their production techniques, business activities and income.



GMS: Phnom Penh Plan for Dev't Mg't (Ph. 2)	Subreg.	MKSS	RETA	TASF France	800.0 1,800.0	Set targets for participation of women and ethnic minorities in scholarship and training programs for middle and senior-level managers from government.
GMS: Sustainable Livelihoods Protection & Nat. Res. Mg't	Subreg./ Other	MKAE	RETA	PRF	1,500.0	Consult with rural women from various ethnic minority groups on their livelihood activities, including farming/gardening, livestock raising, fishing and foraging; consider women's roles in rural livelihood activities and natural resource management; identify opportunities to support these roles through a GMS natural resource management strategy.
<b>2006</b>						
Sector- Wide Approaches in Education Sector Dev't	Educ.	MKSS	ADTA	TASF	500.0	See Basic Education Development Project (Table 1).
Capacity Building for Decentralized Local Governance	Law/Publi c Sector Mg't	MKGF	ADTA	TASF	700.0	Strengthen capacity at provincial and district levels for gender-aware planning and budgeting, better coordination with provincial and district LWU, and consultation with women groups at village level; ensure gender/ethnic balance in any training or workshops.
<b>2007</b>						
Institutional Strengthening in Health Sector Dev't	Health/ Nutrition/ Soc. Prot.	MKSS	ADTA	TASF	500.0	See Health Sector Development Project (Table 1).
Implementation Support for Pub. Admin. Reform Program	Law/ Pub. Sector Mg't	MKGF	ADTA	TASF	800.0	See Public Administration Reform Program (Table 1).

\* This table does not include several technical assistance projects in the current pipelines for Lao PDR and the GMS, including PPTAs for loans that are already included in Table 1, some ADTAs, and economic/thematic/sector studies. These pipelines are subject to change.

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**SELECTED MULTILATERAL, BILATERAL AND NGO ACTIVITIES SUPPORTING GENDER EQUALITY  
IN LAO PDR\***

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Gender-Related Goals/Approaches</b>	<b>Gender-Related Activities</b>
<b>Multilateral Organizations/Programs</b>		
Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)	Integrate gender considerations in technical programs and gender-responsive strategies in field programs, including gender mainstreaming in planning, monitoring, reporting and evaluation.	Gender-analysis training in farmers' water management; gender concerns addressed in promotion of home and school gardens, integrated pest management by small vegetable growers, raising of small livestock, and other food security programs. FAO has provides technical support on gender mainstreaming in agriculture and forestry, including gender-disaggregating agriculture statistics and providing gender-responsive extension services.
Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)	Explicitly address gender inequalities fueling the spread of HIV/AIDS.	Coordinating UN System's Common Strategy for HIV/AIDS/STI in Lao PDR, including gender-sensitive, rights-based and multisectoral approaches. Specific UNAIDS activities include prevention of mother-to-child transmission.
International Fund for Agriculture and Development (IFAD)	Expand women's access to and control over capital, land, knowledge and technologies; strengthen their decision-making role in community affairs and representation in local institutions; and improve well-being and ease workloads by facilitating access to basic rural services and infrastructure. Incorporate priorities and needs of both men and women and give them equal opportunities to access benefits and services.	Promoting participatory rural development activities in Oudomxay, including gender-sensitivity training of provincial and district staff; literacy/numeracy training, gender-sensitive rural finance, women as caretakers of water supply schemes. Partnering with LWU in Oudomxay, Xayabury and Xiengkhouang rural development projects to encourage women's participation.

International Labour Organization (ILO)	Gender equality is key to ILO's "decent work" agenda. Gender concerns are addressed through all policies and programs, including gender-specific analysis and interventions.	Support for social security reform (including improvements in social security scheme for private enterprise workers and consideration of options to extend social security coverage to uncovered groups-; awareness-raising and provincial programs to combat trafficking in children and women; support of women's small and microenterprises; support for ratification of ILO conventions on child labor.
International Organization for Migration (IOM)	Ensure that particular needs of women migrants are identified, considered and addressed. Gender concerns are mainstreamed through gender working groups, focal points and a plan of action.	Psychosocial assistance and lifeskills development for trafficking survivors who are being repatriated (e.g., from Thailand to Lao PDR) – part of Mekong regional program to support voluntary return and reintegration of trafficking survivors.
Mekong River Commission (MRC)		Supporting Network for Promoting Gender in Fisheries Development (including Lao PDR).
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)	Support equal rights of women and girls, and their full participation and empowerment in the community and within their families. Gender equality is necessary to ensure the basic needs, full potential and rights of girls, boys and women; it is also crucial to the achievement of other UNICEF goals (e.g., prevention of HIV/AIDS and child trafficking). Therefore, each UNICEF program and project is required to address gender-based aspects and impacts.	Virtually all projects in the Lao PDR country program (2002-2006) have gender-related goals and gender-responsive approaches. These include projects on safe motherhood; growth development (including nutritional supplements for pregnant and nursing women); development of young children and women (through support of equitable village-level planning, nonformal education and skills training, and capacity-building of women to manage drug revolving funds and rice banks); improvements in school and community water/sanitation facilities; child protection (including child workers, and sexually exploited and trafficked children); advocacy for CRC and CEDAW; social mobilization, especially in ethnic minority areas; and prevention of HIV/AIDS among children, youth and women of reproductive age, migrants and factory workers, and other at-risk groups.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Gender equality is a core UNDP commitment and a crosscutting issue, to be addressed through capacity development (both in-country and in-house), pro-poor and pro-women's policy advice, and support of stand-alone operational interventions for gender equality in collaboration with UNIFEM.	Supporting the Gender Resource Information and Development Centre (GRID), with NORAD; CEDAW implementation and reporting; development of a gender mainstreaming strategy for the National Assembly and the Women's Parliamentary Caucus; effective gender mainstreaming in the NGPES; and pilot maternity waiting homes in selected districts. Gender concerns are also included in rural development projects in Xayabury and Sekong, support for participatory planning at local levels, research on livelihood strategies of ethnic minority villages in Luang Namtha and Sekong, and the National Human Development Report.
United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)	Support innovative and experimental activities benefiting women; serve as a catalyst to ensure appropriate involvement of women in mainstream development activities; and play a catalytic role in the UN system of development cooperation. Program areas include promotion of women's human rights, political participation and economic security.	Recent activities include supporting CEDAW implementation, establishment of Lao PDR's National Commission for the Advancement of Women, establishment of a pilot drop-in counseling center for women victims of violence, and overseas training for students.
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)	To promote gender equality and women's empowerment, a gender perspective is to be integrated in UNESCO's policy planning, programming, implementation and evaluation activities. Women's priorities and vision of development goals and approaches must be addressed and promoted through greater participation of women at all levels and in all areas of UNESCO action.	Recent or ongoing activities include support for Lao PDR's Education for All initiative, research on gender and ethnicity issues in access to primary and secondary education, and a regional program to promote prevention messages on HIV/AIDS and trafficking through radio programs in ethnic minority languages.

United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Trafficking in Women and Children (UNIAP)		Providing technical and capacity-building support to new anti-trafficking unit in Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare; coordinating donor and NGO support of anti-trafficking projects in Lao PDR; coordinating with regional anti-trafficking projects.
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)	Gender equality and women's empowerment are essential to the success of population and development programs, and reproductive health is a right of women and men.	Supporting Lao PDR's development of a new reproductive health policy (updating the National Population and Development Policy adopted in 1999); integration of reproductive health education in school curricula; supporting delivery of basic package of reproductive health services in selected provinces; and partnering with Lao Women's Union and Lao Youth Union to raise awareness of reproductive health issues in villages and among at-risk groups (including bar girls and sex workers).
World Bank	Work with governments, civil society and other donors to diagnose gender-related barriers to and opportunities for poverty reduction and sustainable development; and then identify and support appropriate actions to reduce these barriers and capitalize on the opportunities.	Gender concerns are included in the Agriculture Development Project (Village Investment for the Poor component), Second Land Titling Project, Poverty Reduction Fund Project, Provincial Infrastructure Project (participatory, gender-equitable approach in community water supply and sanitation subprojects), and new Second Education Development Project.
World Food Programme (WFP)	WFP's eight enhanced commitments to women (2003-2007): meet nutritional requirements of expectant and nursing mothers and adolescent girls; expand activities to enable girls to attend school; ensure women benefit at least equally from food-for-training and food-for-work; support women's control of food in food relief distributions; ensure women's equal involvement in food distribution committees and other local bodies;	School feeding program (including take-home rations for girls, and involvement of mothers and Lao Women's Union in local decision-making); gender-inclusive provisions in food security programs; specific attention to women and children in emergency flood relief.



	mainstream gender in programming activities; acknowledge women's important role in ensuring food security; and improve gender equality in staffing and gender-sensitivity of human resources policies.	
World Health Organization (WHO)	Contribute to better health for both women and men through health research, policies and programs which give due attention to gender considerations and promote gender equity and equality.	Supporting pilot maternity waiting homes and improved maternal services (with UNDP); expanded program on immunization (EPI); improved clinical practices for prevention/monitoring/care of HIV/AIDS/STDs; also pilot community health insurance and district health system.
<b>Bilateral Agencies/Funds</b>		
Agence Française de Développement (AFD)	Reduction of gender inequalities is integral to AFD's mission. This includes promotion of nondiscrimination between men and women, particularly in access to and control over resources and incomes.	Cofinancing Decentralized Irrigation Development and Management Sector Project (water user association development and extension services) and Nam Ngum River Basin Development Sector Project (with gender action plan) with ADB; cofinancing new Second Education Development Project with World Bank; supporting gender assessment and strategy for Nam Theun 2 Project; also supporting basic education, rural development and urban development.
Australian Agency for International Dev't (AusAID)	Ensure that both women and men participate in development activities; provide equal rights and access to resources and opportunities for women and girls; take both women's and men's needs, priorities and interests into consideration.	Rural Women in Community Development and Family Health; Lao-Australia Basic Education for Girls Project (cofinancing with ADB); Property Rights and Land Titling (cofinancing with World Bank); Forages and Livestock Systems (participatory approaches to small livestock raising in upland areas, executed by Int'l Center for Tropical Agriculture); Asia Regional Cooperation to Prevent People Trafficking Project (including work with law enforcement in Lao PDR). Recent projects have also supported primary health care, HIV/AIDS prevention and care, immunizations, rural WSS and rural livelihoods (several implemented by INGOs).

Canadian Agency for International Development (CIDA) and Canada Fund for Local Initiatives	Advance women's equal participation with men as decision-makers in shaping sustainable development of their societies; support women and girls in realization of their full human rights; and reduce gender inequalities in access to and control over resources and benefits of development.	Social Development for Vulnerable Groups (including improved access of women and children to basic social services); Sustainable Agriculture and Forestry (including work with villagers, especially women, to improve rural livelihoods); Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (gender criteria are used in selection and monitoring of small-scale projects); funding of UNIFEM to support CEDAW implementation in Lao PDR and other Asian countries.
European Community (EC)/European Union (EU)	EC-Lao PDR projects pay special attention to gender relations, including support of women's participation in local decision-making and development activities, starting with composition of project staff and selection of project activities.	Current and recent projects support basic health, primary and non-formal education, rural microprojects to improve social infrastructure, rural food security, livestock services/extension and community forest management (several implemented by INGOs).
German Technical Cooperation (GTZ)	Gender equality is a GTZ imperative; women and men are to have equal access to project services and to be able to participate equally in project design and development.	Gender concerns are included in two umbrella programs, Integrated Rural Development of Mountain Regions in the North of Lao PDR, and Program to Develop Human Resources for Economic Reform and Development of a Market Economy. Recent projects have supported rural development and vocational and non-formal education.
Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)	Gender equality is a basic policy under Japan's ODA Charter (revised 2003), which commits to make further efforts to improve the status of women, give full consideration to the active participation of women in development, and ensure that women reap benefits from development.	Recent projects addressing gender issues have included basic health, local development (including vocational training for women), agriculture and aquaculture projects. Gender-related support has also been provided through gender training programs and work of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers.
Lux-Development S.A.		Support for vocational training school in Khammouane Province and primary health care in Vientiane Province; also providing technical support to IFAD and WFP in implementing their rural development and food security projects.

Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)	Gender equality is a cross-cutting SIDA issue. Gender action plans are required for all new Lao PDR projects, and will be followed up in project reviews.	Promoting gender disaggregation of statistics by National Statistical Center; HIV/AIDS awareness in road sector projects; teacher training (TTEST project) and community involvement in basic education; the Participatory Development Training Center (PADETC); and dissemination of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Past activities have included support for gender mainstreaming in the forestry sector and gender-equitable approaches to rural water supply and sanitation (with UNICEF and World Bank).
United States Agency for International Development (USAID)	Gender inequalities are addressed to reduce economic and social inequities, improve the probability of growth and broader civic participation, and improve program results. Gender considerations cut across all aspects of USAID programs.	Promoting village-based silk production, especially involving women, as an alternative to opium production (implemented by CONSORTIUM); funding of social marketing of contraceptives; also supporting regional programs on prevention of HIV/AIDS and human trafficking.
<b>International Nongovernment Organizations</b>		
Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)	Promote and expand the equitable and participatory involvement of women in the development process.	Rural health, water and sanitation, and silk weaving projects. Also supporting management strengthening of Lao Women's Union and preparing alternative livelihoods project in Nam Ha river basin for JFPR funding.
Action Contre la Faim (ACF)	Charter of principles includes nondiscrimination on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion or class.	Food security and livelihoods projects with ethnic minority villages in upland areas include improvements in drinking water supply, health awareness and disease prevention, vegetable cultivation, fruit orchards and poultry raising; goals include lightening women's workloads.
Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad (APHEDA)	Commitment to justice and human rights is a cornerstone of APHEDA's work.	Vocational training and capacity-building programs for women, including partnership with Lao Women's Union.
Australian Red Cross	ARC assists Red Cross Societies in the Asia-Pacific region to build capacity and support the most vulnerable people in their communities.	Supports Lao Red Cross through youth peer education on HIV/AIDS prevention, home and community care to people living with HIV/AIDS, water and sanitation improvements, community-based first-aid training, and capacity building.

Canadian Volunteer Organization (CUSO)	Program areas include livelihoods, environment and rights, including gender equality.	CUSO serves as umbrella for the Lao PDR Gender and Development Group (see below). Its sustainable integrated agriculture and forestry project includes gender training and supports improvements in food security, basic health (including family planning and mother/child care), and natural resource conservation
CARE Laos  CARE Laos, continued	CARE Laos gender policy integrates gender awareness and sensitivity into all planning, implementation and evaluation processes.	Gender equity and diversity project included gender audit, gender sensitization of all staff including senior management, capacity building of the CARE gender training team and integration of gender concerns in project activities. Other gender-related projects include reproductive health awareness program for factory workers, HIV/AIDS/STD prevention and care in selected provinces and among marginalized mobile groups, food security and livelihood projects (including partnership with Lao Women's Union).
Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC)	CRWRC's work in Lao PDR aims to empower local community participants, especially women, leaders and development managers.	Community livelihood development project in Xiengkhouang supports improvements in basic health (including family planning and mother/child care) and clean water supply for poorest communities in selected districts.
Comité de Coopération avec le Laos (CCL)		Activities include medical training in obstetrics/gynecology and other specialties; rural development in Phongsaly.
Cooperation Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité (CIDSE)	CIDSE-LAO's vision is an improved quality of life for all peoples in Lao PDR, in which equality between them as well as between men and women is guaranteed and in which they are able to develop themselves in a self-reliant way; it promotes participation of the poorest of the poor in the development process, with special emphasis on women and ethnic people.	Current and recent rural development programs have supported village education (including adult education), primary health care at village level, improvements in household food security (including home gardening and livestock raising) and water supply, and community forestry, with special emphasis on women and youth.

CONCERN Worldwide	Many of CONCERN's program areas focus in particular on women.	Rural development projects use participatory and gender-aware approaches, and support improvements in basic education (formal and non-formal), basic health care (including mother/child care), and livelihoods.
CONSORTIUM (collaboration between World Education and World Learning)		Projects include promotion of silk weaving (with particular focus on women microentrepreneurs) prevention of human trafficking through community awareness-raising and vocational training of at-risk youth, especially young women and ethnic minorities.
Cooperazione e Sviluppo Onlus (CESVI)	Guiding principles include working for the needs of others, without distinction of sex, race, culture or creed, but paying greatest attention to those most at risk, including women.	Rural development and food security projects include gender training.
Church World Service (CWS)	CWS gives special priority to the needs of women by supporting initiatives that emphasize gender awareness and improve women's access to resources, education and decision-making.	Activities include in-service training of primary school teachers (including strategies to encourage girls' attendance) in Oudomxay and Phongsaly; four nonformal training centers for ethnic minority teens in remote northern areas; community center for at-risk youth in Vientiane; and Women and Children in Difficulty Program providing counseling and small-scale support for poor women and children in Vientiane.
Danish Red Cross (DRC)		Primary health care program supports improvements in basic health care at village level and awareness-raising on risky behavior.
Écoles sans Frontière (ESF)		Recent projects include improving adolescent awareness of reproductive health issues and developing materials for non-formal education.
Enfants d' Ailleurs (EA)		Recent projects include support for primary health care (including training of health workers and mobile health teams, and establishment of drug revolving funds) and reproductive health services for adolescents.

Enfants et Développement (EED)		Recent projects include support for primary health care and reproductive health services for adolescents.
Entraide Medicale Internationale (EMI)		Recent projects include support for primary health care (including nurses' training and drug revolving funds).
Family Health International (FHI)	Gender considerations are woven into every aspect of FHI's work.	Recent projects include HIV/AIDS sentinel surveillance.
Family Planning Australia (FPA)	Improve health and economic status of rural women and their families.	Rural women's development project supports reproductive health information for women, men and adolescents; improved food security and livelihoods for women; capacity-building of Lao Women's Union; and gender awareness-raising of district government staff.
Gender and Development Group (GDG) (affiliation of NGOs working in Lao PDR)	Goal of GDG is to promote equality between women and men in socioeconomic development by improving women's quality of life and social position.	Provides forum for gender training, exchange of ideas and best practices on gender for NGO members. Recently conducted participatory research on domestic violence in rural communities.
German Agro Action (GAA)	Supports landless people, small-scale farmers, women, children and youth, and survivors of conflict and environmental disasters. Future priorities in Lao PDR include support for women, ethnic minorities and marginalized inhabitants of remote rural areas.	Rural development projects include support for gender-sensitive extension services and village infrastructure, and community development activities with a gender focus.
Handicap International (HI)/Action Nord Sud (ANS)		Community health care projects include support for mother/child care, safe water outlets and HIV/AIDS awareness. Rural development projects include attention to gender issues at village level. HI/ANS is also implementing the JFPR-funded Community Managed Livelihood Improvement Project and AFD-financed activities in the Decentralized Irrigation Development and Management Project (formation of water user associations and improvement in extension services).

International Cooperation NGO IV-Japan (IV-Japan)		Early activities in Lao PDR included training of community development workers working with Lao Women's Union to improve women's lives. More recent projects support organic agriculture and community forestry.
Lao Red Cross (affiliated with International Federation of the Red Cross)	Ensure equal opportunity for women staff to participate in and lead activities; foster professional atmosphere of gender sensitivity and awareness; improve gender balance in overall personnel staffing; and enable women as well as men to voice concerns and ideas, make decisions, and have access to learning, power and benefits	Gender mainstreaming activities include recent gender-awareness workshop for managers, modification of programs to become more gender-sensitive, development of new gender-sensitive programs, and improvement in gender balance of staff. Programs include community-based first aid training, improvements in water and sanitation, HIV/AIDS education for adolescents, and HIV/AIDS care.
Macfarlane Burnet Institute for Medical Research and Public Health		HIV/AIDS/STI prevention and treatment projects target service women at drink shops and guesthouses, adolescents, communities and mobile people along road corridors, and young Lao soldiers and police. All projects include attention to gender issues.
Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)	Commitment to "become more sensitive to gender issues and to seek culturally appropriate ways to challenge unjust structures and prejudicial attitudes." (1994)	Primary health care project supports training of village health workers and traditional birth attendants, health awareness and health education. Community development project supports enhancement of women's skills in silkworm raising and silk weaving.
Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)	Cross-cutting perspectives include promoting equal rights and opportunities for women and men. NCA works to ensure the participation of women in projects it supports.	Project activities include work with communities to prevent human trafficking and the spread of HIV, and to promote alternatives to opium production. Regional activities also include efforts to improve living conditions of garment factory workers.
Oxfam Community Action Abroad (CAA)	CAA follows a GAD approach and aims to address women's rights and needs in all aspects of its work.	Recent activities include support for a gender and development program in selected provinces (with Lao Women's Union), primary school teaching, rural youth employment training and sustainable community livelihoods.

Population Services International (PSI)		Promotes social marketing of condoms and oral contraceptives, including awareness-raising about HIV/AIDS/STDs and information about family planning
Quaker Service in Laos (QSL)	Promote equal opportunity for all members of the community.	Community development program includes gender training and supports activities of interest to women, including improvements in basic health care (including family planning and mother/child care), nonformal education, handicraft production and microfinance. QSL's Training Unit supports research and training on gender issues. QSL is also implementing activities under the JFPR-funded Community-Managed Livelihood Improvement Project.
Save the Children (Australia)	SCA aims to ensure that all children, regardless of gender, race, country of origin or religious belief, have the means for survival, receive protection, and have access to nutrition, primary health care and basic education.	Projects have included a successful primary health project in Xayabury (including substantial reductions in maternal and child mortality rates); rural water and sanitation improvements (including technical training of women); community development (in partnership with Lao Women's Union); and support for prevention of HIV/AIDS, drug abuse and trafficking among youth at risk.
Save the Children Fund (UK)	SCF (UK) seeks to end discrimination and integrate gender issues in its work; promote girls' rights and raise awareness of problems around male identity; empower girls and boost their confidence; and create more responsible relationships between boys and girls.	Participatory action research with migrant youth in border areas of northern Lao PDR, and capacity building to combat trafficking in children and youth in the northern provinces.
SNV	SNV gender policy promotes gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment.	SNV gender advisor has been providing technical assistance to the Gender Resource Information and Development Center (see below), has conducted a gender audit of SNV's own programs, and is working to mainstream gender concerns in SNV's work on ecotourism, non-timber forest products and local governance.



Village Focus International	Principles include gender equality in planning and decision-making.	Projects support village-based education, farmer training in integrated pest management, prevention of child trafficking, and assistance to repatriated young women and men.
Vredeseilanden (VECO)	Gender participation and respect for culture are cross-cutting themes included in all VECO's work.	Sustainable agriculture projects include gender training and gender-sensitive support for improvements in livelihoods of ethnic minority villagers.
World Vision (WV)	Gender is a focus of the new WV country strategy, and is the basis for a new gender policy.	Mother and child health projects support improved delivery of health services to mothers and women of child-bearing age, including translation of health education materials into ethnic minority languages. Poverty reduction projects include women in training and other activities. WV staff recently received gender-awareness training and participated in a gender self-assessment, as a basis for a new gender policy.
<b>Research/Training Centers</b>		
Gender Resource Information and Development Centre (GRID)	Promotes gender mainstreaming through gender research, training and other activities.	Recent activities include coordination with the National Statistical Center to collect and promote use of sex-disaggregated statistics; development of guidelines and training materials for gender-sensitive planning; gender-awareness and skills training for government staff and mass media; quantitative and qualitative research on the situation of Lao women and other topics; consultations on integrating gender in the NGPES; preparation of a country gender analysis and profile; maintenance of a gender resource library; and production of newsletters, posters, calendars and videos.

Participatory Development Education Training Centre (PADETC)		Private non-profit training center's activities include training of youth in leadership skills; use of radio, TV and video to promote awareness of HIV/AIDS, drug abuse and migration/trafficking risks among young people; promoting garbage recycling (including participation in JFPR-funded project on Solid Waste Management and Income Generation for Vientiane's Poor); and promoting fuel-efficient stoves, preserving and processing of local produce, marketing of locally-produced goods (including through the Internet), and ICT training for young people.
Rural Resource and Development Training Centre (RRDTC)		Steps are being taken to register QSL's training unit, which provides training on gender mainstreaming and other topics, as an independent non-profit organization under the name of RRDTC,

Sources include the organizations' websites, their program documents and other materials, questionnaire responses and the Internet Directory of INGOs in the Lao PDR (<http://www.directoryofngos.org/>).

